

IVAN GONCHAROV

THE SAME  
OLD STORY



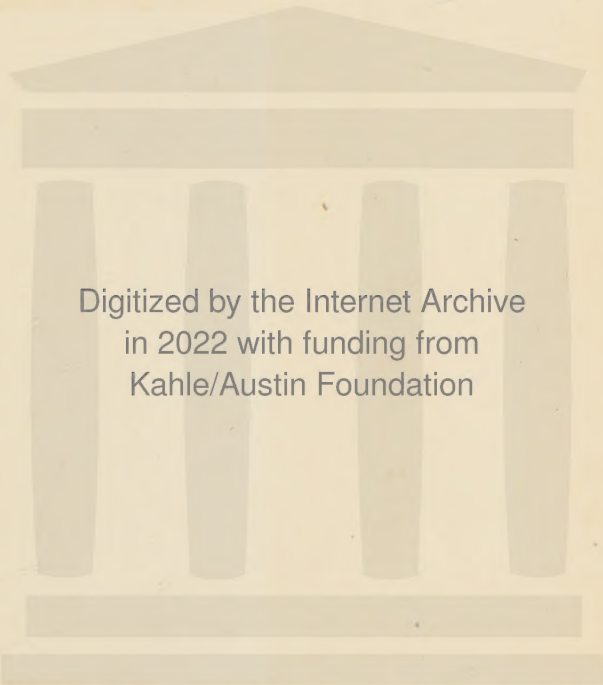
"...Goncharov's *The Same Old Story* is the talk of Petersburg—an enormous success! Everyone likes it... and indeed his talent is remarkable. It seems to me that his main characteristic, his personality, as it were, is the complete lack of scholasticism, bookishness and literary pretensions.... And what a service his book does to society! What a fatal blow to romanticism, vague aspiration, sentimentality, provincialism...."

V. G. BELINSKY

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I. GONCHAROV  
*Drawing by P. Borel*  
*(from the photograph of 1847)*







И В А Н      Г О Н Ч А Р О В

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ  
*Москва*

I V A N      G O N C H A R O V

THE SAME  
OLD STORY

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

*Moscow*

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN  
BY IVY LITVINOVA

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I

**O**ne summer day the entire household of Anna Pavlovna Aduyeva, the owner of a modest estate in the village of Grachi, was up at dawn, from the mistress herself to Barbos the watchdog.

But Anna Pavlovna's only son, the twenty-year-old Alexander Fyodorich, slept the sound sleep of youth. The house was full of fuss and flurry, but everybody went on tiptoe and spoke in whispers, so as not to wake the young master. If anyone made the slightest noise, or spoke loudly, Anna Pavlovna was on the spot instantly, like an infuriated lionness, scolding the thoughtless one severely, showering insulting epithets, and sometimes, if very angry and feeling strong enough, even using her fists.

In the kitchen frantic preparations were on foot, as if for a great company, although the proprietor's family consisted of only two persons—Anna Pavlovna and Alexander Fyodorich. In the coach-house the carriage was being polished and the wheels greased. All were busy, all worked in the sweat of their brow. Barbos was the only one who had nothing to do, but even he took part in the general stir in his own way. When a footman or the coachman passed him, or a maidservant scurried across the yard, he wagged his tail and sniffed energetically at the passer-by, while his eyes

seemed to say: I do wish somebody would tell me what all the fuss is about!

Now, all this fuss was simply because Anna Pavlovna was seeing her son off to work in a government office in Petersburg, or, as she put it, to see the world, and let the world see him. A tragic day for her! And that is why she was so melancholy and irritable. Every now and then, in the midst of her cares, she opened her mouth to give some order, but stopped half-way through the sentence, her voice failing her, and turned aside to wipe away a tear, or if too late, to let it drop into the trunk in which she was packing Sashenka's clothes. Tears had long been welling up in her heart, they lay like a weight in her breast, reached her throat and threatened to gush up in torrents. But, as if saving them up for the last farewell, she only shed an occasional tear.

She was not the only one mourning the coming separation—Sashenka's man-servant, Yevsei, was also overcome with grief. He was going with his master to Petersburg, leaving the warmest nook in the house, behind the stove in the room of Agrafena, the prime minister of Anna Pavlovna's cabinet, and what was still more important for Yevsei—her house-keeper.

There was only just room behind the stove for two chairs and a table, for serving tea, coffee, and *hors-d'oeuvres*. Yevsei had entrenched himself firmly both on one of the chairs and in the heart of Agrafena. The second chair was for herself alone.

The affair of Agrafena and Yevsei was an old story in the house. Like all such affairs it was discussed, with much slanderous gossip about the persons involved, and then, like all such affairs, dropped. The mistress herself was used to seeing them together, and they had enjoyed ten years of bliss. There are not many who can count ten happy years

in their whole existence. But now the hour of bereavement had struck! Farewell, warm nook, farewell, Agrafena Ivanovna, farewell, games of *duraki* \*, coffee, vodka, cordials — farewell everything!

Yevsei sat in his accustomed place, sighing noisily. Agrafena, a perpetual scowl on her face, busied herself about the house. She expressed her grief in a way of her own. That day she poured out the tea fiercely, and instead of handing the first cup, very strong, to her mistress, as she usually did, she poured it away, as if to say "nobody shall have it," taking her mistress's rating with stoical firmness. The coffee was boiled too long, the cream "caught," the cups slipped through her fingers. She did not place the tray on the table, she banged it down. She did not merely unlock cupboards and doors, she wrenched them open. But she shed no tears, only vented her rage on everything and everybody. And this was quite in keeping with her character. She was never satisfied; nothing suited her; she was always scolding and complaining. But at this crucial moment of her life her character displayed itself in all its splendour. And it seemed as if no one annoyed her so much as Yevsei.

"Agrafena Ivanovna!" he wailed with a plaintive tenderness that did not quite suit his tall, but closely-knit figure.

"Couldn't you sit somewhere else, you dolt?" she replied, as if he had never sat there before. "Let me pass, I want to get a towel."

"Ah, Agrafena Ivanovna!" he repeated languidly, sighing and getting up, only to sink back on to the seat as soon as she had taken the towel.

"He can do nothing but whimper! Sticking to me like a leech! A perfect pest, dear Lord!"

And she dropped a spoon noisily into the slop-basin.

\* A card-game, something like "Beggar My Neighbour." *Tr.*

"Agrafena!" came suddenly from the next room. "Have you gone mad? Don't you know Sashenka's still asleep? What are you doing—fighting with your beloved, by way of farewell?"

"You'd like me not to stir, sit there like the dead!" hissed Agrafena venomously, drying a cup with both her hands as if she would have liked to break it into pieces.

"Farewell! Farewell!" said Yevsei, heaving a mighty sigh. "The last day, Agrafena Ivanovna!"

"And thank God for that! Good riddance to bad rubbish! There'll be more room. Get out of the way, now, I can't move! Stretching out your long legs!"

He tried touching her on the shoulder—and didn't she give him what for! He heaved another sigh, but made no attempt to move. And he was quite right, that was not what Agrafena wanted. Yevsei knew this, and was not disturbed.

"Who will sit in my place?" he murmured, with another sigh.

"A pixie!" she snapped.

"God grant it! So long as it's not Proshka. And who will play *duraki* with you?"

"Well, and supposing Proshka does, what of it?" she asked venomously.

Yevsei rose.

"Don't play with Proshka—only not that!" he said in anxious, almost threatening tones.

"And who's to prevent me, pray? The likes of you?"

"Dear Agrafena Ivanovna!" he pleaded, putting his arm round what might have been called her waist, if there had been the slightest hint of a waist in her figure.

She responded to the embrace by sticking her elbow into his chest.

"Dear Agrafena Ivanovna!" he repeated. "Will Proshka love you as much as I do? You know what a rascal he is—



he's after every woman he sees. And I—oh! Why, you're the apple of my eye! If it weren't the mistress's will ... oh!"

He groaned and made a gesture of despair. Agrafena could bear no more—at last even *her* grief showed itself in tears.

"Can't you leave me alone, you miserable wretch?" she said through her tears. "How you do go on! As if I would take up with Proshka! Can't you see nobody can get a word of sense out of him? All he thinks about is pawing me..."

"So he *has* been after you! The scoundrel! And you never told me a word! I'd—"

"Only let him try to touch me! As if I was the only female in the house! Me to take up with Proshka! What next, I wonder! It makes me sick even to sit next to him—the dirty swine. If one doesn't look out he's up to striking someone, or eating the mistress's victuals under one's very nose, and nobody ever noticing!"

"Agrafena Ivanovna, if the necessity *should* arise—the Evil One is very cunning—better let Grishka take my place. He's a quiet, hard-working chap, he isn't one of your scoffers."

"There you go again!" shouted Agrafena. "What makes you shove all sorts of people on me—as if I was some—Get out! There's plenty of you men, and I'm not the one to throw myself at the first-comer. You were the only one, you pixie, I got myself mixed up with, the Evil One must have caught me in his toils for my sins, and I repent it ... and you keep on nagging at me!"

"God reward you for your goodness! It's a weight off my shoulders!" exclaimed Yevsei.

"Now he's pleased!" she shouted ferociously. "If you find anything to be pleased about in that you're welcome to it!"

And her very lips turned pale with fury. Neither of them spoke for a few moments.

And then: "Agrafena Ivanovna," began Yevsei timidly.

"Now what?"

"I was almost forgetting—I haven't had a crumb since the morning."

"Is that all?"

"It's on account of my grief."

She reached for a glass of vodka and two huge hunks of bread and ham from behind a sugar-loaf on the bottom shelf of the cupboard. All this had long been made ready for him by her solicitous hands. She thrust the food and drink at him—you would hardly fling food to a dog so roughly. One hunk fell on the floor.

"Here you are—choke yourself! The devil take you! Quiet now, the whole house can hear you champing!"

She turned away from him with an expression of assumed disgust, and he began slowly eating, eyeing Agrafena from beneath his brows, and covering his mouth with his free hand.

In the meanwhile a carriage and three drove up to the gate. The shaft-bow was fixed over the wheel-horse. The little bell, hanging from it, its clapper lolling from side to side, emitted hollow sounds, like the tongue of a drunken man, bound and flung into a cell. The coachman tied up the horses under a pent-house, took off his cap, and extracted from it a grubby towel, with which he proceeded to wipe the sweat from his face. Catching sight of him from the window, Anna Pavlovna turned pale. Her knees gave, and her hands hung limp at her sides, although she had been on the look-out for the carriage. Mastering her emotion, she called Agrafena.

"Go on tiptoe, very, very quietly, and see if Sashenka's still asleep," she said. "His last day will go in sleep, the darling, and I shan't be able to look my fill at him. But no, you can't—you'd steal in about as quietly as a cow. I'd better go myself."

And off she went.

"Go yourself, since you're not a cow," muttered Agrafena, returning to her room. "So I'm a cow, am I? You haven't many cows like me, have you?"

Anna Pavlovna was met by Alexander himself, a strong, healthy, flaxen haired lad in the hey-day of youth. He greeted his mother cheerfully, but catching sight of the trunks and bundles turned in silent embarrassment to the window and began tracing on the pane with his finger. A moment later he was talking to his mother again, and even regarding the preparations for the journey with carefree enjoyment.

"You shouldn't have slept so late, my love!" said Anna Pavlovna. "Your face is all puffy. Let me rinse your eyes and cheeks with rose-water."

"Please don't, Mamma."

"What would you like for breakfast—will you begin with tea or coffee? I've ordered chopped meat fried in sour cream. Will you have some?"

"Anything you like, Mamma."

Anna Pavlovna went on packing the linen for a while, and then stopped, gazing wistfully at her son.

"Sasha," she said, after a short pause.

"What is it, Mamma?"

She hesitated, as if in vague terror.

"Where are you going, my love, why are you going?" she brought out softly, at last.

"Where, Mamma? Why, to Petersburg, to ... to —"

"Listen, Sasha," she said, in agitated tones, placing a hand on his shoulder, with the evident intention of making one last attempt. "It's not too late—think it over! Don't go!"

"Not go? Impossible! Besides, the ... the clothes are all packed," he said, at a loss for words.

"Your clothes! There, and there, and there... look—they're not packed."

She emptied the trunk in three armfuls.

"But, Mamma, what d'you mean? I'm all ready, and now you want me to stay. What would people think?"

He looked unhappy.

"It's not for myself—it's for your sake. What are you going for? To seek happiness? Aren't you happy here? Doesn't your mother think all day long how to satisfy your lightest whim? Of course you are of an age when your mother's efforts to please you are not enough to make you happy. And I don't expect them to. But, look around you—everyone wants to please you. Marya Karpovna's daughter, Sonyushka, too. Ah, you're blushing? How she loves you, God bless her, the darling! They say she hasn't slept for three nights!"

"Come now, Mamma! She only—"

"As if I couldn't see! Oh—I mustn't forget! She promised to hem some handkerchiefs for you. 'I'll do them all myself,' she said. 'I won't let anyone else do them, and I'll mark them, too.' What more could you wish? Don't go!"

He listened in silence, with bowed head, playing with the tassels of his dressing-gown.

"What will you find in Petersburg?" she continued. "Do you think you'll be as well looked after as you are here? Oh, my dear! God knows what you'll have to endure—cold and hunger and want—you'll have to bear it all. There are plenty of bad people everywhere, but you won't find good people so easily. And as for distinction—what's the difference whether it's town or country? When you know nothing of Petersburg life you think you are the first person in the world, living here. It's the same everywhere, dearie! You're well-bred and clever and handsome. The only joy left to an old woman like me is to look at you. You could marry, God

would send you little ones, and I could dandle them—and you would have no sorrows or cares, you could live out your days in peace and quiet, envying no one. Perhaps things won't be so good there, perhaps you'll remember my words.... Do stay, Sashenka!"

He cleared his throat and sighed, but uttered not a word. "See!" she continued, opening the balcony door. "Can you bear to leave such a sweet nook?"

A cool fragrance came into the room through the open door. A garden planted with ancient lime-trees, dense thickets of wild rose, wild cherry trees and lilac bushes stretched from the house far into the distance. There were beds of gaily-coloured flowers among the trees, paths running in all directions; and beyond them lay the lake, softly splashing against its shores; one half of it, smooth as a mirror, reflected the gold of the morning sun, the surface of the other half was ruffled and of a deep blue, like the sky above it. Still further, the tossing, multicoloured cornfields rose in a kind of amphitheatre towards the dark woods in the background.

Anna Pavlovna, shading her eyes from the sun with one hand, pointed to all these objects in turn with her free hand.

"See," she said, "how beautifully God has adorned our fields! We shall take as much as twelve hundred poods of rye alone from these fields. And over there are wheat and buckwheat. The buckwheat is not as good as it was last year, probably the harvest will be poor. But look at the woods—see how they have grown! See how great is God's wisdom! We will get at the very least a thousand rubles for our wood. And the game—the game! And it's all yours, dear son. I am only your stewardess. Just look at that lake—what splendour! Truly divine! And the fish in it! The only fish we have to buy is sturgeon—the lake is teeming with ruff,

perch and crucian—enough for ourselves and our servants. Look at your cows and horses grazing over there! You are the master of everything here, while there—who knows—everyone will lord it over you. And you want to run away from all this bliss—whither to, you don't rightly know yourself, perhaps—God forbid!—you'll land in some swamp. Stay!"

He said nothing.

"You're not listening," she said. "What's that you're staring at?"

He pointed in silent thoughtfulness to the distance. Anna Pavlovna followed his glance, and changed countenance. Between the fields the road wound like a snake, disappearing into the woods and reappearing on the other side—the road to the Promised Land, to Petersburg. Anna Pavlovna was silent a few minutes, trying to master her emotions.

"So that's it," she at last brought out mournfully. "Well, never mind, my love! Go, since you long to leave this place, I will not keep you. You shall never say that your mother spoiled your youth and your prospects."

Unhappy mother! This is the reward for all your love! Is this what you expected? Ah, but mothers expect no reward. A mother loves unthinkingly, disinterestedly. If you are great, famous, handsome, proud, if your name is on the lips of all men, if your deeds are renowned throughout the world—the old woman quivers with joy, she weeps, laughs, prays long and fervently. And her son seldom thinks of sharing his fame with his mother. If you are low-spirited and dull-witted, if you are poor in soul or body, if Nature has set the brand of ugliness upon you, if you are sick, body or soul, if, finally, men repulse you and you find no place among them—all the more readily will you find a place in your mother's heart. She presses the ill-favoured, misbegotten offspring still more warmly to her breast, prays still longer and more fervently for him.

Must Alexander be considered callous because he brought himself to part with his mother? He was twenty years of age. Life had smiled on him from the cradle.

His mother had petted and spoiled him, as mothers always do spoil an only child. His nurse had sung to him while he was still in his cradle that he would always be rich and never know sorrow. His professors had declared he would go far, and when he returned home from his studies the neighbour's daughter had smiled at him. Even Vaska, the old tomcat, seemed to prefer him to everyone else in the house.

Of grief, tears and disasters he knew only by hearsay, as people know of some disease which has never come their way, and only lurks remotely among less fortunate folk. And so the future presented itself to him in rainbow colours. Something seemed to beckon him from afar, though what it was he did not exactly know. Delightful visions flitted by before he could make out what they were. Blended sounds rang in his ears—the voice of glory, the voice of love. And all this kept him in a state of delicious agitation.

His home soon became too narrow for him. Nature, the love of his mother, the adoration of his nurse and the whole household, his soft couch, the good food and the purring of Vaska—all these blessings which are so much appreciated on the downward slope of life, he cheerfully surrendered for an unknown full of irresistible, mysterious charm. Not even the love of Sophia—first love, so tender and rosy—could hold him back. What did he care for it? What he dreamed of was a great passion knowing no limits and capable of resounding feats. In the meantime he loved Sophia with a moderate love while waiting for some great passion to come his way. He dreamed, too, of the services he would do for his country. He had studied diligently and extensively. His diploma testified to his knowledge of a dozen subjects, as well as half a dozen languages, ancient and modern. His fondest dream



was to become a famous writer. His verses had astonished his friends. Innumerable paths lay before him, each more alluring than the other. He did not know which to set foot upon. Only the straight road was hidden from his eyes—if he had noticed it, perhaps he would not have gone away.

But how could he stay at home? His mother desired it, and that was but natural of course. Love for her son was the only feeling left in her heart, and it seized eagerly upon this last object. But for this, what would there have been left for her to do? She might as well have been dead. It has long ago been pointed out that the heart of a woman cannot exist without love.

Home life had spoilt Alexander, but it had not corrupted his heart. Nature had done so well by him, that the love of his mother and the adoration of those surrounding him had only affected the better side of his character, developing in him emotional susceptibility, and implanting in him an excessive trustfulness. Perhaps they were the cause of the first stirrings of vanity in him; but vanity itself is a mere mold, everything depends on the material we pour into it.

Much more unfortunate for him was his mother's inability, for all her tenderness, to instil in him a right attitude to life, to prepare him for the struggle which lay in wait for him, as for everyone. But this would have required a skilled touch, a subtle mind and a great store of experience, not limited by the cramped horizon of rural life. For this she should have loved him less, not thought of him every moment of the day, not shielded him from every care and unpleasantness, not done his weeping and suffering for him when he was a child, so as to keep away from him the approach of storms, she should have let him cope with them himself and think over his own destiny—in a word realize that he was a man. But how was Anna Pavlovna to understand all this—let alone to fulfil these requirements? The reader has

seen what she was like. Would he like to take another look?

She had already forgotten her son's selfishness. Alexander found her repacking his clothes. Her cares and the bustle of departure seemed to have made her quite unmindful of her grief.

"Look, Sashenka, make a note where I am putting your things," she said. "Right underneath, at the very bottom of the trunk are the sheets—a dozen. See if the list is right."

"Quite right, Mamma!"

"All marked with your initials—see! 'A.A.' And all done by that sweet Sonya. But for her our nimmies would never have got them ready so soon. What next? Oh, yes—pillow-cases. One, two, three, four—a dozen altogether—that's right. Here are the shirts—three dozen. Just look at that lawn! Pure linen—I went myself to Vasily Vasilyevich in his factory. He chose the three very best lengths. Mind you check the list, my love, when your laundry comes from the wash—they're all new. You won't see shirts like that over there; they'll probably change them—some of those washerwomen are the most shameless hussies. Twenty-two pairs of socks. I'll tell you what! Put your wallet in the toe of a sock. You won't need any money till you get to Petersburg, and if, which God forbid, someone starts rummaging in your luggage they won't find it. I'll put the letter for your uncle there too. Won't he be glad to see you! Seventeen years and not a single line—that's no joke! Here are the scarves and there are the handkerchiefs. Sonyushka still has half a dozen to mark. Don't lose your handkerchiefs, ducky, they're wonderful—batiste and cotton! I bought it at Mikheyev's for two rubles twenty-five a yard. Well, that's all the linen. Now for the suits. Where's Yevsei? Why doesn't he come? Yevsei!"

Yevsei sauntered lazily into the room.

"Did you call me?" he asked, still more lazily.

"Call you?" repeated Anna Pavlovna angrily. "Why don't you come and watch me pack? If you should need anything on the way you'll have to turn everything upside down. Can't tear yourself away from your beloved—what a treasure forsooth! The day is long—you'll have plenty of time. Is that how you mean to look after your master there? Mind you do what I say! Look here—this is the best frock-coat—see where I'm putting it? And you, Sashenka, take care of it—don't put it on every day, the cloth costs 16 rubles a yard. Put it on when you have to call on important people, but mind where you sit down, don't be like your aunt, who never seems to be able to find an empty chair or sofa, but manages to flop down just where there's a hat or something. The other day she sat right in a saucer of jam—such a disgrace! When you go to see ordinary people, put on this blue coat. Now for the waistcoats. One, two, three, four. Two pairs of trousers. Ah, me! You have enough clothes to last you three years. Oh dear, how tired I am! After all, I've been seeing to things the whole morning. You can go, Yevsei! Let's talk of something else, Sashenka. The guests will be here soon, and we shall have other things to think about."

She sank on to the sofa and made him sit beside her.

"Well, Sasha," she said after a short pause. "You are now departing for foreign parts—"

"Foreign parts—Petersburg? How can you say so, Mamma?"

"Wait a minute—listen to what I'm going to say. God alone knows whom you will meet there, what you will see, both good and evil. May our Heavenly Father strengthen you! Whatever you do, my dear, do not forget Him, remember that you can never be saved, wherever you are, without faith. Even if you attain high rank over there, and go up in

the world —we're as good as anyone, you know, your father was a nobleman and a major—you must always humble yourself before the Lord God. Pray in equally happiness and in grief, do not be like the peasant in the proverb, who 'does not cross himself so long as the thunder does not roar.' Some people never so much as peep into the church while they are in luck, but when misfortune comes they light candles at a ruble apiece and begin to give alms. That's a great sin. And by the way, about beggars! Don't waste money on them heedlessly, don't give a lot at a time! Why spoil them? You make no impression on them, whatever you give! They'll squander it on drink, and only laugh at you. I know your soft heart—you'll probably start giving ten-kopek pieces all round. But you mustn't do that—the Lord will supply. Will you go regularly to the temple of God? Will you go to mass on Sundays?"

She sighed.

Alexander said nothing. He remembered that while he had been at the university in the district town he had not been a particularly ardent church-goer. And in the country he had only accompanied his mother to church to please her. He was ashamed to lie. He said nothing. His mother understood his silence and sighed again.

"Well, I won't try to force you," she continued. "You are a young man — you can't be expected to be so eager to visit God's church as we old people. And no doubt your work will prevent you, or you'll sit up late in grand company and oversleep yourself. God will have mercy on your youth! Don't fret. You have a mother. She will not sleep late. So long as there is a drop of blood left in my veins, so long as all my tears are not dried up, and God forgives me my sins, I will crawl to the door of the church, if I have not the strength to walk. I will give my last breath, my last tear for you, my dear one. I will gain for you by my prayers health and

rank, awards and blessings, earthly and divine. Surely our merciful Father will not scorn the prayers of a poor old woman! I ask nothing for myself. Let Him deprive me of everything—my health, my life, my sight—so long as He gives you every joy, every happiness, every good thing—”

She could not go on for the tears streaming from her eyes.

Alexander leaped to his feet.

“Mamma!” he exclaimed.

“Sit down, sit down!” she replied, hastily dabbing at her eyes. “I have a great deal more to say. What was I going to say? It’s gone out of my head. See what my memory is like nowadays! Oh, yes—observe fast-days, my dear, that is very important. Never mind Wednesdays and Fridays. God will let you off those, but keep Lent, for God’s sake! Mikhail Mikhailovich, now—he’s considered a clever man, but look at him! He guzzles just the same, meat days or fast days, even in Holy Week. It’s enough to make one’s hair stand on end! He gives to the poor, of course, but the Lord will never accept his charities. They say he once gave ten rubles to an old man, who turned aside and spat when he took it. Everyone bows before him, and says all sorts of nice things to his face, but behind his back they cross themselves when they speak of him, as if he were Satan himself.”

Alexander listened, not without impatience, and kept looking out of the window at the distant road.

She paused for a moment.

“Above all, guard your health,” she went on. “Should you fall seriously ill which God forbid!—let me know. I will rally all my strength and come to you. Who will look after you there? They’ll more likely try to rob the sick. Don’t go out in the streets at night—keep away from rough-looking people. Take care of your money. Oh, and mind you save some for a rainy day! Spend with discretion,

All good and all evil come from the accursed stuff. Do not be dissipated, do not be self-indulgent. You will receive two thousand five hundred rubles a year from me regularly. Two thousand five hundred rubles are not to be sneezed at! Don't go in for luxury of any sort, but don't deprive yourself unnecessarily. If you feel like eating something tasty, do not stint yourself. Do not give yourself up to drink—oh, it is man's chief enemy! And"—here she lowered her voice—"beware of women! I know them! There are shameless hussies who will be ready to throw themselves on your head when they see such a—"

She gazed at her son with love.

"That'll do, Mamma! What about breakfast?" he said with something like annoyance.

"In a minute—just one more word. Do not hanker after other men's wives," she said, hastening to her end. "That is a great sin. It says in the Bible: 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife!' And if some woman or other talks to you about marriage, in the name of God, don't you think of it! They'll be ready enough, the moment they see you have some money and a handsome face. Of course, if your chief, or some great and rich nobleman should take a fancy to you and wish you to marry his daughter—that's a different matter—I wouldn't say no, but you must write to me at once. I'll get to Petersburg by hook or by crook, to see they don't shove just anyone on you, merely for the sake of getting rid of her—some old maid, or bad lot probably! They will all be greedy for such a husband! But if you fall in love with some good girl of your own accord, and the girl is the right sort, well"—she let her voice drop still lower here—"you needn't mind Sonya, you know." (The good old soul was ready to act against her conscience, so fond she was of her boy.) "Indeed, Marya Karpovna should know better than to look so high—as if her daughter were your equal! A mere country-bred

lass! There will be plenty of a much higher station who would deem themselves happy if they got you."

"Sophia! Oh, no, Mamma, I will never forget Sophia!" said Alexander.

"All right, all right, my dear! I didn't mean it! Work, come back home, and then we'll see what the Lord sends. There'll always be plenty of prospective brides. If you don't forget her—all the better. And you won't...."

She seemed to be going to say something, but changed her mind, and then, bending over, asked, close to his ear:

"And you won't forget ... your mother?"

"Now really, Mother!" he interrupted her. "Tell them to bring some food quickly—an omelette or something. Forget you! How could you think such a thing? May God punish me—"

"Stop, Sasha!" she said hastily. "Don't bring curses down on your head! No, no! Whatever happens, if you should commit such a sin, let me be the only one to suffer! You're young, you're just beginning to live, you will find friends, you will marry—a young wife will take the place of your mother and everything. No! May God bless you as I bless you!"

She kissed his forehead, thereby bringing her sermon to an end.

"Why don't they come?" she said. "Marya Karpovna, Anton Ivanich, the priest—none of them have come! Surely service is over! Ah, there's someone coming! Anton Ivanich, I think—so it is! Speak of an angel...."

Everyone knows who Anton Ivanich is. He is the Wandering Jew. Always and everywhere he has existed, from time immemorial, and no one ever saw the last of him. He was present at Greek banquets and Roman feasts, he partook, of course, of the fatted calf slaughtered by the happy father in honour of the return of the prodigal son.



Here in Russia, he moves under various guises. He of whom we are now speaking is the owner of twenty souls, mortgaged up to the hilt; he lives in a house little better than a peasant's hut, or rather in some strange edifice, resembling in appearance a barn, with an entrance somewhere at the back, encumbered by logs, close to the hurdle fence. For twenty years he has been declaring that he will start building a new house next spring. He never entertains in his home. Not a single man of his acquaintance has been known to have dinner or supper with him, or drink a cup of tea, but there is no one in whose house he has not dined or supped fifty times a year.

At one time Anton Ivanich used to go about in wide breeches and a full skirted coat, now he wears, on week-days an overcoat and trousers, on Sundays a frock-coat cut after a most extraordinary pattern. He is stout enough in appearance, having neither griefs, cares nor troubles, though he claims that all his life he has had to bear the griefs and cares of others. It is, however, well known that no one ever wasted away from the griefs and cares of others. That's only human nature.

Nobody really needs Anton Ivanich, but not a single event is celebrated without him—whether it is a wedding or a funeral. He may be seen at all banquets and evening parties and attends all family councils—no one ever takes a step without consulting him. It might be supposed that he is extremely useful, that he fulfils some important commission in one place, gives good advice in another, carries through some bargain in a third—but nothing of the sort! Nobody ever entrusts him with a commission; he can do nothing, he knows nothing—neither how to help somebody in a law-suit, to act as an intermediary, or to conciliate persons at odds with one another.

But there are certain messages he does undertake, such



as, in passing, to convey someone's regards, which he never fails to do, and, while he is about it, to partake of lunch; to inform someone that a certain document has been received, though precisely which one he has not been told; to take a tub of honey or a handful of seed somewhere, with strict injunctions not to spill any; to remind someone of someone else's name-day. Anton Ivanich's services are also requested when it might be awkward to send a servant. "We can't send Petrushka," it is argued. "He's sure to make a mess of it. Better ask Anton Ivanich to go." Or: "It wouldn't do to send a servant—so-and-so might be offended—better send Anton Ivanich."

How astonished people would be if he failed to appear at some dinner or party!

"Where's Anton Ivanich?" everyone would be sure to ask in amazement. "What's the matter with him? Why isn't he here?"

And the dinner would be a failure. Someone would have to be sent to find out what was the matter, whether he was ill, or had gone away. And if he were ill, you might conclude, from the kindly attentions showered upon him, that he was a near and dear relative.

Anton Ivanich bowed over Anna Pavlovna's hand.

"Good day, Anna Pavlovna! Nip for new!"

"New, Anton Ivanich?" echoed Anna Pavlovna, examining herself all over.

"The planks in front of your gate. I see they've just been put down. I noticed the boards didn't jump up and down under the wheels of my cart, and I saw at once they were new."

It was his habit when greeting acquaintances always to congratulate them on something. Either because it was Lent, or spring, or autumn. If frost set in after the thaw, he congratulated his friends on the frost, if a thaw set in after the frost—on the thaw.

There was nothing of this sort just now, but Anton Ivanich always found something.

"Alexandra Vasilyevna, Matryona Mikhailovna and Pyotr Sergeich send you their greetings," he said.

"Thank you so much, Anton Ivanich. Are all their children well?"

"Yes, thank God. I bring you the blessing of the Lord—the priest is just coming. Have you heard, Madam, about Semyon Arkhipich?"

"What?" exclaimed Anna Pavlovna in alarm.

"He has given up the ghost."

"You don't say so! When was it?"

"Yesterday morning. They let me know the same evening. One of their lads came running for me. I went at once, and didn't sleep all night. They're all in tears—I had to console them and give orders—nobody could do anything but cry, except me."

"Dear God!" cried Anna Pavlovna, shaking her head. "This life of ours.... But how did it happen? Only last week he sent us greetings through you."

"Yes, Madam. Oh well, he's been ill a long time, he was a very old man. It's a miracle he held out so long."

"Old? He was only a year older than my dear departed. Well, God rest his soul," said Anna Pavlovna, crossing herself. "Poor Fedosya Petrovna—left with all those children on her hands! Dreadful! Five of them and almost all girls! When will the funeral be?"

"Tomorrow."

"You see each has his own sorrow, Anton Ivanich—here am I saying good-bye to my son."

"It can't be helped, Anna Pavlovna, we are all human. The holy scriptures tell us to endure."

"You mustn't be angry with me for troubling you, I need you to help me to bear my grief, for you feel for us just like one of the family."

"Why, Anna Pavlovna—of course I do, my dear. How many people have we like you? You don't know your own worth! I have any amount of cares—and now my own building plans are in the offing. I wore myself out yesterday, talking to the builder the whole morning, and we still don't seem to be able to come to an agreement. 'But I must go to her,' I said to myself. 'What will she do all alone, without me? She's not so young any more—she'll lose her head.'"

"God bless you for not forgetting us, Anton Ivanich. Yes, I'm not myself at all. My head feels so strange. I hardly know what I'm doing. My throat is quite parched from crying. Won't you have something to eat? You must be tired and hungry, I'm sure."

"Thank you kindly. It's true I did have a little something to eat and drink on the way, at Pyotr Sergeich's. But that won't prevent me. The priest will be here soon, he can say grace. Oh, there he is in the porch!"

The priest entered the room. After him came Marya Karpovna and her daughter, a plump, rosy damsel, with a smile on her face and eyes red from weeping. Sophia's eyes, and the expression of her face plainly said: "I will love simply, without any nonsense, I will look after my husband like a nurse, obey him in all, and never try to be cleverer than he is. For who could be cleverer than a husband? It would be a sin! I will see to the housekeeping diligently, and keep the linen in repair. I will bear him half-a-dozen children, whom I will nurse and look after, dress and mend for, myself." Her fresh-coloured, plump cheeks and ample bosom confirmed the promise as to the children. But the tears in her eyes and her mournful smile rendered her less commonplace-looking for the moment.

First of all the service had to be read, and Anton Ivanich summoned the household, lit a candle, took the book from the priest, and handed it to the clerk when the priest had done with it. After this he poured holy water into a vial which he put in his pocket, with the words: "That's for Agafya Nikitishna!" All sat down to the table. No one but Anton Ivanich and the priest touched the food, of course, but Anton Ivanich did full justice to the Homeric repast. Anna Pavlovna could only cry and wipe her tears furtively away.

"Come, now, my dear Anna Pavlovna, don't cry!" said Anton Ivanich in affected distress, pouring himself out a glass of cordial. "Anyone would think you were sending him to the shambles." Then, drinking off half the contents of the glass, he said, smacking his lips with an expression of extreme satisfaction: "What a cordial! What a bouquet! You won't find another like that in the whole countryside!"

"It's been standing two years," said Anna Pavlovna between her sobs. "I've only just had ... one ... uncorked ... for you."

"I'm ashamed of you, Anna Pavlovna," resumed Anton Ivanich. "What you need is a good beating! A thorough beating!"

"Put yourself in my place, Anton Ivanich—my only son, and he leaving me! Who will be there to bury me when I die?"

"And what about us? Who am I? A stranger, forsooth? And why are you in such a hurry to die? You're more likely to get married! How I should enjoy dancing at your wedding! No more crying, now!"

"I can't help it, Anton Ivanich, really I can't. I wonder myself where the tears come from!"

"As if you could keep a fine young fellow like that cooped up! Give him his freedom, he'll feel his wings, and you just

see the wonders he'll do! He'll win himself promotion over there."

"May your words come true! You've hardly had any pie—take some more!"

"Thank you—I'll just eat that bit. Your health, Alexander Fyodorich! Happy journey! And come back soon! And mind you get married! What are you blushing for, Sophia Vasilyevna?"

"Nothing—I only—"

"Oh, youth, youth! Hee-hee-hee!"

"Nobody can be unhappy when you are there, Anton Ivanich," said Anna Pavlovna. "You're such a comfort! God give you health. Have a little more of this cordial!"

"I will, Anna Pavlovna, I will! One must drink when one comes to say farewell!"

The meal came to an end. The coachman had long ago harnessed the horses to the carriage, and brought it round to the porch. Servants kept running up one at a time. One carried a trunk, another a bundle, yet another a sack, and then they came back for some more. They clung to the carriage like flies round treacle, each thrusting his hands into it.

"That's the best place for the trunk," said one. "And the box of provisions can go here."

"And where are they to put their feet?" enquired another. "Better put the trunk longways, the box can go sideways."

"If you put the trunk longways, the feather mattress will slip—better put it across! What else? Have you packed the boots?"

"I don't know. Who did the packing?"

"It wasn't me! Go and see if they're not upstairs somewhere."

"Go yourself!"

"Why can't you go? You can see I'm busy."

"Here—don't forget this!" shouted a maid thrusting a hand with a bundle in it among the heads.

"Give it here!"

"And put this in the trunk—we forgot it!" said another maid, hoisting herself on to the step of the carriage and handing over a brush and comb.

"How d'you think we can do that now?" a stout footman shouted back at her. "Get away! Can't you see the trunk is right underneath!"

"Mistress's orders! I don't care, you can throw them away, for me! Pack of devils!"

"Give it here then, and be quick about it! It can be stuck into the pocket."

The wheel-horse tossed its head incessantly, the bell on the shaft-bow ringing out stridently every time, like a reminder of parting, but the side-horses stood with heads drooping thoughtfully, as if they realized to the full the delights of the journey before them, every now and then shaking their tails or stretching out their lower lips towards the wheel-horse. At last the fatal moment arrived. They said another prayer.

"Sit down, everyone!"\* commanded Anton Ivanich. "Take a seat, Alexander Fyodorich! And you sit down, Yevsei! Sit down, can't you!" and he let himself down sideways on the seat of a chair for a moment. "Well—God be with you!"

Here Anna Pavlovna burst out weeping and hung on Alexander's neck.

"Farewell, farewell, my dear one!" could be heard through her sobs. "Shall I ever see you again?"

And then all was chaos. Suddenly the sound of another shaft-bell was heard and a light cart drawn by three horses

\* It was the custom in Russia for all present to sit down for a few moments before taking leave of a traveller.—*Tr.*

dashed into the yard. A young man covered with dust sprang out of it, ran into the room, and threw himself on Alexander.

"Pospelov!" "Aduyev!" they cried in unison, embracing one another closely.

"Where have you sprung from? How did you get here?"

"From home! I galloped day and night to say good-bye to you."

"You are a true friend!" exclaimed Alexander fervently, tears starting to his eyes. "Drove over a hundred miles to say good-bye! Oh, friendship does exist in the world! For ever, eh?" And he rushed once more at his friend, pressing his hand warmly.

"Till the grave!" replied the other, squeezing Alexander's hand still more violently and pressing up to him.

"Write to me!"

"I will, and you must write too!"

Anna Pavlovna could not make enough of Pospelov. The departure was delayed another half an hour. At last they set off.

All set off on foot for the copse. Sophia and Alexander rushed into one another's arms in the dark porch.

"Sasha! Dear Sasha!" "Sonyechka!" they murmured, but the words died away in a kiss.

"You won't forget me there?" she asked tearfully.

"Oh, how little you know me! I shall return, believe me, and no other shall—"

"Here, take this ... it's my hair and a ring."

He placed the one and the other hastily in his pocket.

Anna Pavlovna led the way with her son and Pospelov, then came Marya Karpovna and her daughter, and last came the priest and Anton Ivanich. The carriage followed a little way behind. The coachman could hardly hold back his horses. The servants surrounded Yevsei at the gate.



"Good-bye, Yevsei Ivanich, good-bye, old fellow, don't forget us!" came from all sides.

"Good-bye, brothers, good-bye! Don't forget me!"

"Good-bye, Yevseyushka, good-bye, my precious one!" said Yevsei's mother, embracing him. "Here's an amulet for you—it comes with my blessing! Guard your faith, Yevsei, mind you don't go over to the heathens there! I'll put my curse on you if you do! Don't drink, don't steal; serve your master truly and faithfully. Good-bye, good-bye!"

She covered her face with her apron and turned away.

"Good-bye, Mother," said Yevsei in his lazy drawl.

A girl of about twelve years rushed up to him.

"Say good-bye to your sister," said a woman in the crowd.

"You here, too?" said Yevsei, kissing her. "Well, good-bye, good-bye! Get back to the hut, you with your bare feet!"

Last of all came Agrafena, who had stood apart from the rest. Her face was a sickly green.

"Good-bye, Agrafena Ivanovna!" said Yevsei, in a shrill drawl, as he stretched out his arms towards her.

She allowed him to embrace her but did not respond to the embrace, except with a twitching of her features.

"There—take it!" she said, producing from under her apron a small bag and thrusting it at him. "You'll be gadding about with the Petersburg wenches, I suppose," she added darting a sidelong glance at him. In this glance could be read all her grief and all her jealousy.

"Me?" cried Yevsei. "May the Lord strike me dead, may my eyeballs burst! May I sink through the ground if I —"

"All right, all right!" muttered Agrafena sceptically. "I know you!"

"Oh, I almost forgot," said Yevsei and brought a greasy pack of cards out of his pocket. "A keepsake for you,



Agrafena Ivanovna! You won't be able to get any here." She held out her hand.

"Give them to me, Yevsei Ivanich!" cried Proshka from the midst of the crowd.

"To you! I'd sooner burn them than give them to you!" And he put the cards back in his pocket.

"Come on, give them to me, you blockhead!" said Agrafena.

"No, Agrafena Ivanovna—say what you like, I shan't give them to you! You'll use them to play with him. Good-bye!"

Without a backward glance he waved his hand and trudged after the carriage, looking sturdy enough to pick it up, Alexander, coachman, horses and all, and carry it on his shoulders.

"Wretch!" cried Agrafena following him with her eyes and drying her streaming tears on the hem of her kerchief.

They all halted at the copse. While Anna Pavlovna sobbed and took leave of her son, Anton Ivanich, after patting one of the horses on the neck, seized it by the nostrils and shook its head from side to side, evidently much to the horse's dissatisfaction, for it bared its teeth and whinnied.

"The girth of the wheel-horse has worked loose," he told the coachman. "Don't you see the shaft-bow is awry?"

The coachman glanced at the collar, but seeing that it was in its right place he did not move from the boxseat, and merely set the breeching to rights a trifle with the end of the whip.

"Time to go—God be with you!" said Anton Ivanich. "Come, Anna Pavlovna—enough of tormenting yourself! And you, Alexander Fyodorich—get in! You've got to be at Shishkovo before nightfall. Good-bye, good-bye, God send you happiness, rank, medals, all that is good and pleas-

ing, all sorts of good things and property! Come now, God speed! Whip up your horses, and mind you keep them well in hand going downhill," he added, addressing the coachman.

Alexander, his cheeks wet with tears, got into the carriage, and Yevsei approached the mistress, bowed low before her and kissed her hand. She gave him a five-ruble note.

"Behave yourself, Yevsei, and remember—if you serve your master well, I'll marry you to Agrafena. If not—"

She could not go on. Yevsei clambered on to the boxseat. The coachman, whom the prolonged delays had wearied, suddenly seemed to come to life. He crushed his cap over his ears, settled himself on the seat, and lifted the reins. The horses started at a light canter. The coachman whipped up the side-horses in turn, they bounded forward, straining their necks, and the *troika* dashed over the road to the forest. The crowd that had turned out to see the travellers off remained behind in a cloud of dust, silent and motionless, until the carriage had quite disappeared from sight.

Anton Ivanich was the first to recover.

"Now everybody can go home," he said.

Alexander had gazed over the back of the carriage until he could no longer see anyone, and then flung himself face downward on the cushioned seat.

"Don't desert me in my misery," said Anna Pavlovna to Anton Ivanich. "Stay and have dinner with me!"

"Certainly, Madam! I'll have supper, too, if you like."

"You might as well stay the night."

"How can I? Tomorrow's the funeral."

"So it is! Well, I won't try to compel you. Give Fedosya Petrovna my love, tell her I am heartily sorry for her grief, and would go to see her myself, if God had not, tell her, sent me grief of my own—if I had not just said good-bye to my son."

"I'll tell her. I'll be sure to tell her."

"Sashenka, my darling!" she whispered, looking round. "He's gone, he's disappeared from sight!"

Anna Pavlovna sat silent the whole day, neither dining nor supping. But Anton Ivanich talked, dined, and supped.

She could only say, from time to time: "Where is he now, my darling?"

"He must be at Neplyuevo now. Oh no, what am I saying? He's not at Neplyuevo, he's only approaching it. He'll have tea there," Anton Ivanich replied.

"No, he never takes anything at this time."

And so Anna Pavlovna travelled with Alexander in her mind. When, according to her reckonings, he must have arrived at Petersburg, she fell to praying, to telling fortunes by the cards, and to talking about Alexander to Marya Karpovna.

And he?

We will meet him next in Petersburg.

## II

Pyotr Ivanovich Aduyev, our hero's uncle, had, like his nephew, gone to Petersburg at the age of twenty, sent there by his elder brother, Alexander's father. And there he had lived for seventeen years without a break. After his brother's death he stopped writing to his relatives, and Anna Pavlovna had had no news of him since the time of his selling his small estate, which was situated not far from her own village.

In Petersburg he passed for a moneyed man, and there may have been sufficient grounds for this opinion. He was attached to some important personage to carry out special commissions, and wore several ribbons in the button-hole of his frock-coat. He lived in one of the principal streets, rented an

excellent apartment, kept three menservants and as many horses. He was not an old man, being at that age described as "the prime of life"—between thirty-five and forty. But he was not fond of alluding to his age, and that not on account of petty vanity, but in accordance with well thought-out calculations, as if he wished to insure his life at a premium. However that may be, no vain desire to please the fair sex could be discerned in his manner of concealing his age.

He was a tall, well-built man; his features were large and regular; his face was of a smooth olive hue, his carriage was good and his manners reserved but agreeable. One of those men who are usually dubbed *bel homme*.

His expression, too, was reserved, showing self-control and a determination to prevent his face from being the mirror of his soul, which, in his opinion, would have been inconvenient both for himself and others. It was thus that he appeared in society. But it would have been erroneous to describe him as wooden-faced—he was merely tranquil. Sometimes, however, traces of fatigue could be discerned in his countenance—no doubt from over-work. He was regarded as an active and practical man. He was always scrupulously well-dressed, even to the point of dandyism, but never over-dressed, and always with taste. His linen was of the best quality, his hands were plump and white, the nails long and rosy.

One morning, after he had waked up and rung for his servant, the latter brought him three letters with his morning tea, and informed him that a young gentleman calling himself Alexander Fyodorich Aduyev, and claiming that Pyotr Ivanich was his uncle, had been, and had promised to come again about twelve o'clock.

Pyotr Ivanich received this information with his usual calm, but he listened very attentively, raising his brows.

"All right. You can go," he said to the servant.

Then he picked up a letter but stopped in the act of opening it, as if lost in thought.

"A nephew from the country—a pleasant surprise!" he muttered. "And I hoped they had quite forgotten about me over there. Well, I shan't stand on ceremony with him. I'll shake him off."

He rang once more.

"Tell that gentleman when he comes that I had to go to the factory as soon as I got up and shall be back in three months."

"Yes, sir," said the servant. "And what shall I do with the presents?"

"What presents?"

"His servant brought them—country presents from the mistress, he said."

"Presents?"

"Yes. A tub of honey, a sack of dried raspberries—"  
Pyotr Ivanich shrugged his shoulders.

"Two lengths of linen, some jam."

"I can imagine what the linen is like!"

"The linen is good, and the jam is made with syrup."

"Very well. Now go. I'll have a look at them presently."

He picked up a letter, opened it and ran his eyes over the page. It looked for all the world like an ancient Slavonic charter, and there was not a single punctuation mark. Aduyev began reading half-aloud.

"Dear Sir, Pyotr Ivanich,

"Having been on friendly terms with your parents and played with you no little in your childhood and having often partaken of bread and salt in your house which emboldens me to feel assured of your goodness and efforts on my behalf in the hope that you have not forgotten old Vasily Tikho-

nich and all in my home pray for all good to you and your parents—”

“Of all the ... who’s it from?” wondered Pyotr Ivanich, glancing at the signature. “Vasily Zayezhalov! Bless me if I remember him! What does he want of me?”

And he went on reading.

“Do not refuse my humble request! In Petersburg it is not the same as here in the country, where we know all about one another and everything is dear and familiar. An accursed lawsuit has been imposed upon me, and I have been struggling with it for nearly seven years. Do you remember the little wood a few miles from my village? The Court made a mistake in the purchase, and my enemy Medvedev has taken advantage of it—the clause is wrong, he says, and that’s all. Medvedev’s the one who kept on fishing in your waters without permission. Your late father drove him away and held him up to shame and always meant to complain of this impertinence to the Governor, but he was too kind-hearted—God rest his soul!—to do it, though such a scoundrel should not have been spared. Help me, Pyotr Ivanich! The case has come up before the Senate. I do not know what department it is, or who will handle it, but I am sure they would show it to you immediately. Go to the secretaries and senators, get them on my side, tell them I am the victim of a misunderstanding, an error in the purchase act. They will do anything for you. And while you are about it you might as well take me out patents for three ranks and send them to me. And I have another very urgent request to you, Pyotr Ivanich—enter into the feelings of an innocent sufferer and aid me with advice and with deeds! There is a certain privy-councillor in the Gubernia administration—Drozhzhov by name—an angel, not a man! He would die rather than let a friend down. I know no other house in the town like his—the moment I arrive I go

straight to him, and stay with him for weeks on end—I would never dream of staying anywhere else, he is always ready with his hospitality. We play boston from after dinner till late in the night. And a man like that is denounced and forced to send in his resignation! Go and see all the grand people, dear friend, tell them what sort of a man Afanasy Ivanich is. Whatever he undertakes is a success. Tell them the information about him is untrue, it was falsified by the Governor's secretary—they'll listen to you—and send me an answer by return of post. And go and see my old colleague Kostyakov. I hear from a man passing through these parts—Studenitsin, one of your Petersburg people, perhaps you know him—that he lives in Peskee.\* Any boy will show you his house. Write by return of post, don't delay, telling me if he is alive and well, what he is doing, if he remembers me. Make his acquaintance, become friends with him. He's a splendid man—open-hearted, jolly.

“I end this letter with one more small request....”

Without reading the letter to the end Aduyev slowly tore it in four, throwing the pieces into a wastepaper-basket under the desk. Then he stretched and yawned.

He selected another letter and began reading it half-aloud, as before.

“Dear Brother, Honoured Sir, Pyotr Ivanich.”

“What sister is this!” exclaimed Aduyev, glancing at the signature. “Marya Gorbatova.” He stared at the ceiling, trying to remember.

“Now what's this? Something familiar ... oh, yes! My brother married a Gorbatova. It must be her sister, the one who ... oh, I remember!”

\* On the outskirts of Petersburg.—*Tr.*



He frowned and resumed his reading.

"Though fate has parted us, for ever, perhaps, and there is a gulf between us ... the years have passed—"

He skipped a few lines and went on reading further.

"I shall remember, till my latest breath, how we walked round our lake together, you in peril of your life and to the danger of your health, going into the water up to your knees to get me a big yellow flower growing in the reeds, and how the juice from its stem stained our hands and you brought water in your cap so that we could wash them. How we used to laugh! How happy I was then! That flower lies between the pages of a book to this day...."

Aduyev stopped reading. Evidently this circumstance displeased him highly. He shook his head incredulously.

"And have you still got that ribbon" — he went on reading—"that you stole from my chest, despite all my cries and prayers—"

"I steal a ribbon?" he cried, frowning heavily. He skipped a few more lines and read on:

"And I have vowed to remain single all my days and feel very happy. No one can prevent me from remembering that blessed time—"

"Aha! An old maid!" said Pyotr Ivanich to himself. "No wonder she cherishes the memory of yellow flowers! What next?"

"Are you married, dear Brother? And if so, to whom? What tender friend adorns with her person the path of your life? Tell me her name! I will love her like a sister, and in my dreams will join her image with yours, I will pray for you both. And if you are not married, then tell me why — write frankly. There is no one here to read your secrets, I will guard them in my bosom, and they will only be wrested from me together with my heart. Do not delay. I burn with impatience to read your ineffable lines —"



"Oh no, you don't—there won't be any ineffable lines," Pyotr Ivanich told himself.

"I did not know"—he read—"that our dear Sasha had suddenly taken it into his head to visit the metropolis—fortunate being! He will see grand houses and shops, enjoy all manner of luxury, and press to his bosom his adored uncle—while I shed tears and remember happier days. If I had known of his departure I would have sat day and night embroidering a cushion for you—a Negro with two dogs. You cannot imagine how often I have wept, glancing at the design. What can be more sacred than friendship and faithfulness? I now have only one thought, to which I devote my days, but there is no good wool here, and so I humbly request you, my dearest Brother, to send me the very best English wool to match the pattern enclosed in this letter, as soon as you can, bought at the best shop. But how I run on! A terrible idea halts my pen. Perhaps you have quite forgotten us, after all, why should you remember a poor sufferer, who lives and weeps far from society. But no! I cannot believe you could be a monster like other men. No! My heart tells me that, amidst the luxury and pleasures of the metropolis, you still cherish your former feelings for all of us. This thought is balm for my suffering heart. Forgive me, I cannot go on, my hand shakes....

*"Yours till the grave,*

*"MARYA GORBATOVA.*

"P.S. Haven't you got any nice books, Brother? Send me some, if you don't need them yourself. I would remember you on every page, and weep, or you might buy some new ones in a shop, if they're not too expensive. They say Mr. Zagoskin and Mr. Marlinsky have written some very nice novels—any of these would do. And I read in the news-

paper about something called *On Prejudices*, by Mr. Puzini—do send it, I can't bear prejudices!"

When he got to the end Aduyev's first impulse was to throw this letter away too, but he refrained.

"No," he told himself. "I'll keep it. There are people who like letters of this sort. Regular collections are made. I may have a chance to oblige someone."

He threw it into a beaded basket hanging on the wall, and passed on to the third letter.

"My dear brother-in-law, Pyotr Ivanich," he read.

"Do you remember how we saw you off seventeen years ago? And now God has called upon me to send my own child off with my blessing on a long journey. Look at him, dear friend, and remember the dear departed, our precious Fyodor Ivanich. Sashenka is the image of him. God alone knows what my mother's heart has gone through, in letting him go to strange parts. I send my dear one straight to you. I told him not to stay anywhere but with you."

Aduyev shook his head again.

"Silly old woman!" he growled and went on reading.

"In his inexperience he would probably have put up at an inn, but I know how this would grieve his uncle, and told him to go straight to you. Oh, what a happy meeting you will have! Do not deny him your advice, my dear brother-in-law, and take him under your wing. I hand him straight over to you."

Again Pyotr Ivanich came to a stop.

"He has no one but you," he read. "Look after him, don't spoil him, but don't be too severe, either. There will always be people to criticize, that's what strangers are for, but one's own folk can show affection. And he's such an affectionate lad. You only have to see him, and you'll never want to part with him. And tell his chief, when he goes to work, to look after my Sashenka and, above

all, to treat him kindly. He's very sensitive, you know. Guard him from wine and cards. I suppose you'll be sleeping in the same room—Sashenka has a habit of sleeping on his back, and that makes him groan and toss, poor child. You must wake him gently and make the sign of the cross over him, and it will pass at once. In the summer you must cover his mouth with a handkerchief. It falls open in his sleep, and the accursed flies get in towards the morning. And do not fail him if he should need money."

Aduyev frowned, but his face cleared again when he read on:

"I will send whatever is required, I have given him one thousand rubles to keep by him, don't let him spend it on trifles, and see he doesn't fall into the hands of some wheedling rascal, there must be plenty of swindlers and rogues in the capital. And last of all forgive me, dear brother-in-law, I have almost forgotten how to write.

*"Respectfully, your sister-in-law,*  
*"A. ADUYEVA.*

"P.S. I send you our country gifts—raspberries from my own garden, white honey, as pure as tears, sheer lawn for two dozen shirts, and some home-made jam. Use all this and may it bring you health. When you come to an end of it I will send some more. Look after Yevsei, too. He is obedient and does not drink, but he may get spoilt in the capital; if so, whip him."

Pyotr Ivanich slowly replaced the letter on the table, extracted a cigar still more slowly, and, after rolling it between his hands, began to smoke. He meditated long on the trick, as he called it in his own mind, which his sister-in-law had played on him. He made a searching mental analysis of the situation, and the steps he ought himself to take.

He split it all up under the following headings: he did not know his nephew and, therefore, could not love him, and so his heart dictated no obligations whatever to him, and any decision must be based on the laws of reason and justice. His brother had married and known the pleasures of conjugal life, but why should he, Pyotr Ivanich, who had enjoyed none of the privileges of marriage, burden himself with the care of his brother's son? There was no earthly reason why he should.

On the other hand the situation might be summed up as follows: a mother sends her son straight to him, to his care, without knowing whether or not he desired to undertake such a burden, without even knowing whether he was alive and in a position to do anything for his nephew. This was, of course, foolish, but since the thing had been done and the nephew was in Petersburg, with no one to help him and no friends, even without letters of introduction to anyone, young, completely inexperienced ... was he justified in leaving him to his fate, casting him into the multitude, without advice or instructions? And if any evil should befall him, would not Pyotr Ivanich have to answer for it to his own conscience?

Here Aduyev could not but remember how his deceased brother and that same Anna Pavlovna had seen him off, seventeen years previously. They certainly could not have done anything for him in Petersburg, and he had made his way himself ... but he remembered her tears on parting with him, how she had blessed him like a mother, her caresses, her ples, and her parting words: "When Sashenka grows up"—Sashenka was then a child of three—"perhaps you will be kind to him, Brother." At this stage in his meditations Pyotr Ivanich rose and strode hastily into the hall.

"Vasily!" he cried. "When my nephew calls, show him in. And go and find out if the room upstairs is still to let, and if it is, tell them I will take it. Oh—the presents! What shall we do with them?"

"The storekeeper saw them being taken upstairs, and asked me if we would care to sell him the honey. 'I'll give a good price,' he said, and he would take the raspberries, too."

"Excellent! Let him have them! Well, and what about the lawn? Would it do for loose covers? Then put it away, and the jam, too—it can be eaten. It looks good."

Pyotr Ivanich was just going to start shaving when Alexander Fyodorich arrived. He would have fallen on his uncle's neck, but Pyotr Ivanich, pressing the youth's tender palm in his powerful fist, kept him at a certain distance, as if to take a good look at him, but in reality to check his effusions and keep them within the limits of a handshake.

"Your mother is right," he said. "You are the living image of my late brother. I would have known you anywhere. But you are better-looking. Well, I won't stand on ceremony with you—I'll go on shaving, and you sit there, opposite me, so that I can see you. And let us have a talk."

With these words Pyotr Ivanich went about his business as if there were nobody by, soaping his jaws and bulging out each cheek in turn with his tongue. Alexander was embarrassed by such a reception, and did not know how to begin the conversation. He attributed the coldness of his uncle to the fact that he had not put up in his house immediately.

"Well, how is your mother? In good health? She must be getting on in years, I suppose," asked the uncle, making faces at himself in the mirror.

"Mamma is well, thank God. She sends you greetings and my aunt Marya Pavlovna does, too," said Alexander timidly. "My aunt told me to give you a kiss from her." He rose and approached his uncle, with the intention of kissing him on the cheek, the head, the shoulder, or anywhere he could.

"Your aunt is old enough to know better, but I see she is just as great a fool as she was twenty years ago."

The perplexed Alexander retreated to his place.

"Have you had her letter, Uncle?" he asked.

"Yes, I have."

"Vasily Tikhonich Zayezhalov," said Alexander Fyodorich, "earnestly requests you to look into his case, and—"

"Yes, I've had a letter from him, too. Do you still have donkeys like that in the country?"

Alexander did not know what to think—so confounded was he by such a reception.

"Forgive me, Uncle," he began, almost in trepidation.

"What for?"

"Forgive me for not having gone straight to you, but putting up at the coaching inn. I did not know where you lived."

"Why apologize? You did very well. Goodness knows what your Mamma meant! How could you have come to me without knowing if I had anywhere to put you up? I live, as you see, in a bachelor's apartment, just enough for one—reception-room, drawing-room, dining-room, sitting-room, study, dressing-room and washing-room—not a room to spare. I would be in your way, and you would be in mine. But I have found a room for you in this house."

"Oh, Uncle!" cried Alexander. "How can I thank you for your kindness?"

And again he sprang up with the intention of proving his sense of obligation by word and deed.

"Not so fast, don't touch me!" said his uncle. "The razor is very sharp, you'll cut yourself and me, too, if you're not careful."

Alexander realized that try as he might he would not be able on this day to embrace and press to his bosom his adored uncle, and postponed the operation for another time.

"A cheerful room," continued Pyotr Ivanich. "True, the windows look out on a wall, but you won't be sitting at the window all day. When you're at home you'll be busy, you won't have any time to be gaping out of the window. And not expensive—only forty rubles a month. There's a place in the hall for your servant. You must learn to live alone from the very beginning, without a nurse. You can keep your own table and tea-service, in a word, your own nook, your own *chez soi*, as the French say. You can receive anyone you like there. Of course when I dine at home you will always be welcome, and otherwise—young men here mostly dine at an inn, but I would advise you to send out for dinner. It's quieter at home and you don't risk rubbing shoulders with God knows whom. Do you agree with me?"

"I am very grateful to you, Uncle."

"No occasion for gratitude. We're kinsmen, aren't we? I am only doing my duty. Well, I must dress and go out, I have my work, and my factory."

"I didn't know you had a factory, Uncle."

"Glass and porcelain. But it's not only mine. I have two partners."

"Does it do well?"

"Not bad. We sell mostly at fairs in distant provinces. We've done very well in the last couple of years. If things



go like that another five years we shall be all right. One of my partners is not very reliable, however—a spend-thrift, but I know how to keep him in hand. Well, good-bye! Have a look at the town, stroll about, dine somewhere, and come to me for tea this evening. I shall be at home, and we can have a real talk. Vasily! Show the gentleman his room and help him to settle down.”

“So that’s how it is in Petersburg,” said Alexander to himself, alone in his new dwelling. “If one’s own uncle is like that, what will strangers be like?”

Young Aduyev paced his room in profound meditation. And Yevsei talked to himself as he set the room to rights.

“What kind of a life is it here?” he growled. “They say the stove is only heated once a month in Pyotr Ivanich’s kitchen, people mostly dine out. Oh, Lord! Fine folk, I must say! And they call themselves Petersburgers. Even the dogs have their own platters in our parts.”

Alexander seemed to share Yevsei’s opinion, though he said nothing. He went to the window, from which he had a view of chimneys, roofs, and brick walls, black with soot ... and he compared all this with what, only two weeks ago, he had seen from the window of his house in the country. He felt disheartened.

He went out—in the street he found aimless bustle, everyone hastening somewhere, absorbed in his own business, scarcely looking up at the passers-by, and then only to avoid jostling one another. He remembered the district town, where the most casual meetings in the street were, in some way or other, interesting. Ivan Ivanich goes to see Pyotr Petrovich, and the whole town knows why. Marya Martynovna comes out of church, Afanasy Savich goes fishing. A policeman rides at breakneck speed from the Governor’s house to the doctor’s, and everyone knows that Her Excellency has deigned to bring forth an infant.



although, according to the cronies and grannies, no one ought to have known anything about it. Everyone asks: is it a boy or a girl? The ladies get out their best caps. And there comes Matvei Matveich, stepping out of his house with his stout stick at six o'clock in the evening, and everyone knows that he is taking his evening constitutional, without which his digestion would not work, and that he will not fail to stop at the window of the old privy-councillor who, as is also well known, takes tea at that hour. A greeting and a few words are exchanged with every person you meet, and even if you do not greet a person, you know exactly who he is, where he is going, and what for, and in his glance you can read: and I know who you are and where you are going, and what for. If it *should* happen that strangers, who have never before met, come across one another in the street, the faces of both become living question-marks. They halt and look back once or twice, and when they get home they describe the dress and gait of the unknown individual, and many are the surmises as to who the stranger could be, where he came from, and what he had come for. But here in Petersburg, people look at one another, jostle one another in the road, as if they were all sworn foes.

At first Alexander glanced with the curiosity of a country-dweller into the faces of every passer-by and every decently dressed person, taking each one for some minister of state, foreign envoy, or famous writer. "Could it be he?" he wondered. "Is it that one?" But he soon got tired of this, for he met ministers, writers and diplomats at every step.

When he looked at the houses he felt still more disheartened. The sight of these monotonous stony edifices, succeeding one another like vast tombs in an unbroken chain, plunged him into gloom. "When the street comes to

an end," he told himself, "there will be space for the eye to roam—a hill, some trees, a tumble-down fence," but no!—there was nothing but the same stone walls of exactly similar houses, each with its four rows of windows. And when this street came to an end, another, just like it, began. Whether you looked to the right or to the left, houses, houses, houses, stone upon stone, over and over again, closed in on you like an army of giants. No space for the eye to rest on ... you were hemmed in on all sides—and human thought and feeling seemed to be hemmed in, too.

The provincial visitor's first impressions of Petersburg are gloomy. Everything seems strange and mournful to him; no one takes any notice of him; he is lost in the great city; neither the novelty, the variety, nor the crowd can distract him. His provincial vanity is at war with everything he sees here, and has not seen at home. He ponders over it all, and transfers himself mentally to his native town. How pleasant everything looks there! One house has a peaked roof and a garden filled with acacias. Here is a little pent-house on the roof—a shelter for pigeons. The merchant Izyumin is a great pigeon-fancier, that's why he built a dove-cote on the roof for them; he stands on the roof every morning and every evening, in nightcap and robe, waving a stick, to which a rag is attached, and whistling. The next house is like a lantern—it has windows on all four sides, and a flat roof, a very old house; it looks as if it were just about to fall down or burn up by spontaneous combustion; the shingles have acquired a light grey shade. Nervous work living in a house like that—but people do live there. The proprietor occasionally takes a look at the sloping ceiling and shakes his head, wondering aloud if it will hold till spring. Then he says, "Let's hope it will," and goes on as before, fearing

more for his purse than for himself. Next door is the quaint concave façade of the apothecary's house, with two wings like sentry-boxes; and beside it is a house smothered in foliage. And now comes one which has turned its back on the street, and then a fence over a mile long, from behind which may be discerned rosy apples hanging from the boughs—a temptation to little boys. The houses keep the churches, which are surrounded by dense grass and tombstones, at a respectful distance. Anyone can see that an office is an office: no one approaches it except on business. But here, in the capital, an office is not to be distinguished from ordinary houses, and there is even—just fancy!—a shop in the same building. At home, as soon as you have walked through a few streets you begin to sense the untrammelled air, you pass vegetable plots surrounded by hurdle fences, and presently you come to cornfields. And the quiet, the stillness, the monotony! In the streets, in the faces of people, the same stillness. And everyone lives as he likes, with no attempt at concealment. No one is cramped for space. The very cocks and hens strut about the streets at their own sweet will, the goats and cows nibble the grass-stalks, the little boys fly kites.

But here—oh, how melancholy it is! And the provincial visitor sighs for the fence in front of his window, for the dusty, dirty street, the shaky bridge, the sign hanging over the door of the shop. He hates to admit that St. Isaac's Cathedral is grander and taller than the church in his native town, that the hall in the Club of the Nobility is bigger than the hall at home. He maintains an angry silence when such comparisons are made in his hearing, sometimes, however, venturing to remark that a certain cloth or wine is cheaper and better in his home town, and that people there would not waste a glance at rarities from over the sea, such as those huge prawns

and shells and red fish. "Buy stuff and useless trifles from foreigners, if you like," they say, "they swindle you, and you are grateful to them!" And how delighted the provincial is when he discovers that the caviare, the pears, or the bread-rolls are better in his native town. "Call that a pear?" he says. "In our parts the *servants* wouldn't eat it!"

But when he enters one of these houses with a letter of introduction, his disenchantment is still greater. He had expected to be received with open arms, everybody vying with one another to find him a seat, to offer him food ... they will skilfully elicit—he thinks—what his favourite dish is, and he will be so overcome by all this attention that he will end by throwing ceremony aside, embracing host and hostess, and addressing them as "*thou*," as if they had known one another twenty years. Everyone will drink home-made wine, perhaps sing in chorus....

But not a bit of it! They hardly glance at him, they grimace, say they are busy. If you have come on business they name an hour when people neither dine nor sup, and no one seems to know anything about any other time for a snack or a glass of vodka. The host retreats from your embrace, and regards the guest rather queerly. From the next room comes the sound of spoons clattering, glasses ringing—the visitor expects an invitation, but he is induced to go away by various subtle hints. Everywhere locked doors, everywhere door-bells—and isn't that a wretched thing? And faces are cold, inhospitable. In our parts, you walk boldly in. If the family has had dinner already, they will lay the table for the guest all over again. The samovar is always on the table, morning and evening, and there are no door-bells even in the shops. All and sundry are met with embraces and kisses. There, a neighbour really is a neighbour. People live in the most

cordial, intimate relations. A relation really is a relation there. He would die for his own kin ... ah me!

Alexander reached Admiralty Square, and was stunned with admiration. He stood in front of the Bronze Horseman a whole hour, in ecstatic meditation, not, like the unfortunate Yevgeny in Puskin's poem, with bitter upbraidings in his soul. He gazed at the Neva and at the buildings on either side of it, and his eyes glowed. He felt suddenly ashamed of his devotion to the shaky bridges, the little gardens, the broken-down fences. His mood changed to one of elation. The bustle, the crowd—everything acquired new significance in his eyes. Once more the hopes, crushed under the weight of his first, melancholy impressions, sprang into being. The new life opened its arms to him, luring him towards the unknown. His heart beat violently. He dreamed of lofty toil, of noble aspirations, and strode proudly along Nevsky Prospekt, telling himself that he was a citizen of a new world. Still dreaming, he returned home.

At eleven o'clock that evening his uncle invited him to drink tea.

"I've just come from the theatre," he said, from the sofa where he was lying.

"What a pity you didn't tell me, Uncle—I would have gone with you."

"I was in the stalls, where would you have sat—on my lap?" rejoined Pyotr Ivanich. "You can go by yourself tomorrow."

"It's so melancholy all by oneself in the crowd, Uncle. There's no one to exchange impressions with."

"And no reason to do so. You must learn to feel and think—in a word, to live—alone. The time will come when you will need the ability. And before you go to the theatre you'll have to get yourself some decent clothes."

Alexander looked down at his coat, astonished at his uncle's words.

"What's wrong with my clothes?" he asked himself. "Blue coat, blue trousers . . . I have a lot of clothes, Uncle," he said. "Königstein made them—he makes the Governor's clothes."

"Can't be helped—they won't do. I'll take you to my own tailor in a day or two. But that's a trifle. There are more important things to discuss. Tell me—what made you come here?"

"I came here—to live."

"To live? If by that you mean to eat, drink and sleep, it wasn't worth while coming so far. You will not eat or sleep as well as you did in the country. But if you had any other ideas, kindly explain them."

"To enjoy life was what I meant to say," added Alexander, blushing hotly. "I got tired of living in the country—the same thing over and over again."

"Ah-ha! So that's it! And do you intend to rent a first floor on Nevsky Prospekt, to keep a carriage, to acquire a wide range of acquaintances, and have a regular at-home day?"

"All that would be very expensive," said Alexander naïvely.

"Your mother writes that she has given you a thousand rubles," said Pyotr Ivanich. "That's not enough. An acquaintance of mine arrived recently—he was tired of the country, too, and wanted to enjoy life. But he brought with him fifty thousand rubles, and will receive as much every year. He really will enjoy life in Petersburg, whereas you—will not. That's not what you came for."

"You seem to imply, Uncle, that I don't know what I came for."

"That's about the truth of the matter, or rather, there is some truth in it. And that's no good, either. Surely, before deciding to come you must have put yourself the question: what am I going for? It would have been as well if you had."

"My answer was ready before I put myself that question," replied Alexander, not without pride.

"Then why don't you tell me? Well, what was the answer?"

"I was drawn here by an unconquerable desire, by a thirst for noble activities. I was devoured by the desire to elucidate, to fulfil—"

Pyotr Ivanich raised himself a little on the sofa, took the cigar out of his mouth and listened attentively.

"—To fulfil those hopes which surged—"

"You don't write poetry, do you?" asked Pyotr Ivanich suddenly.

"Yes, and prose, Uncle. Shall I bring some to show you?"

"No, no! Later on. I just asked."

"Why?"

"Oh, the way you speak..."

"Don't you like the way I speak?"

"I don't say that. It's very fine no doubt, only rather odd."

"Our teacher of esthetics used to speak like that and he was considered the most eloquent of all the professors," said Alexander, somewhat taken aback.

"What did he talk about?"

"About his subject."

"Ah!"

"How ought I to speak, Uncle?"

"More simply, like everybody else, and not like a professor of esthetics. But this can't be explained all of a



sudden: you'll see afterwards for yourself. As far as I remember university lectures and can interpret your words, you wish to say that you came here to make a career and a fortune. Is that it?"

"Yes, Uncle, a career—"

"And a fortune," added Pyotr Ivanich. "What's a career without a fortune? A good idea—but you shouldn't have come."

"Why not? It isn't your own experience that makes you say that, I hope," said Alexander looking round the room.

"Well said! It's true I have a comfortable apartment and my affairs go well enough. But, as far as I can see, there is a great difference between you and me."

"I should not dream of comparing myself to you."

"That's not the point. You may be ten times cleverer and better than I am, but it seems to me that your nature is not one to submit to the new ways. And as for the ways prevalent in the country—upon my word! You, for instance, have always been the spoiled darling of your mother—how could you endure what I have had to go through? You're probably a dreamer, and there's no time for dreaming here. People of our sort come here to get things done."

"Perhaps I would be able to accomplish something, if you did not refuse me your advice and the fruits of your experience."

"I'm afraid to advise you. I cannot answer for you and your country ways. If nothing came of it you might reproach me, but I don't mind telling you my opinion, if you like. You can heed it or not, just as you choose. But, no! I have no hope of success. You have your own outlook on life. How can you change it? You are all for love, for friendship, for the delights of life, for happiness. People over there think life consists in nothing else—all ah's

and oh's. They shed tears, moan, say pretty things, but they do nothing. How am I to break you of all that? It's not so easy."

"I will endeavour to adapt myself to modern ways, Uncle. Only today, gazing at these vast edifices, at the ships which bring gifts from distant lands to us, I meditated on the achievements of modern man, I understood the agitation of this crowd, its rational activities, and felt ready to merge myself with it."

During this monologue Pyotr Ivanich's eyebrows shot up higher and higher, and he gazed attentively at his nephew. Alexander broke off.

"A simple enough matter," said his uncle. "But look what they get into their heads — this crowd with its rational activities! You should have stayed at home, indeed you should have! You could have lived out your days there in perfect content. You would have been the cleverest of all, there, passing for an author and an eloquent individual, believing in eternal, unchangeable love and friendship, in kinship, and in happiness. You would have married and your life would have flowed on smoothly into old age, and you really would have been happy in your own way; but you will never be happy as they understand happiness here. All your conceptions would have to be reversed."

"But, Uncle—are not love and friendship those sacred, lofty emotions which have fallen, as it were by chance, from heaven to the earth and its filth?"

"What's that?"

Alexander said nothing.

"Love and friendship have fallen into the filth! Now really, you can't talk such nonsense *here!*"

"Do not they exist here as much as there, I should like to know?"

"There are love and friendship here, too. Where are these qualities not to be found? But they're not the same as they are in the country. In time you will learn this for yourself. The first thing you must do is to forget these *sacred* and *divine* emotions, and regard things as they really are. It would be a great deal better, and you would speak more simply. But after all, it's none of my business. You're here, and you don't intend to go back. If you don't find what you're looking for, don't blame me. I can only tell you what, in my opinion, is good, and what I consider bad, and you can do as you like. Who knows, perhaps it may be possible to make something of you. Oh, yes! Your Mother asks me to supply you with money. Now, listen to me! Don't ask me for money. It is fatal to a good understanding between decent people. But you mustn't think I would refuse you. Oh, no! If you have no alternative, you must apply to me, of course. After all, it would be better to borrow from an uncle than from a stranger—at least you wouldn't have to pay interest. But to prevent such an emergency arising I would rather look for a place for you, so that you can earn money. Well, good-bye! Look in tomorrow, we'll discuss ways and means."

Alexander made to go back to his room.

"I say—wouldn't you like some supper?" his uncle called after him.

"Why, yes, Uncle, I wouldn't mind."

"I haven't got anything."

Alexander said nothing. "Then why the invitation?" he thought.

"I don't eat at home, and the taverns are all shut now," continued his uncle. "Let it be a lesson to you at the very start—get used to it. You get up and go to bed with the sun in the country, and eat and drink according to the dictates of nature. If it's cold you put on a cap with ear-

flaps, and there you are; when it's light—that's the daytime, when it's dark, that's night. *You* can hardly keep your eyes open now, but *I* shall sit down to work—I must have my accounts ready by the end of the month. You breathe fresh air all the year round, over there, but that pleasure costs money here, like everything else. Poles apart! People don't eat supper here, especially at their own expense—and not at mine either. And it'll be good for you—you won't groan and toss in your sleep so much and I have no time to get up and make the sign of the cross over you."

"It will be quite easy to get accustomed to that, Uncle."

"All the better. And is it still the same as it used to be in the country—can you visit friends in the night, and count on their getting supper for you at once?"

"Why, Uncle, I hope there's nothing wrong with that! The Russian's chief virtue—"

"Now, now! What's the virtue in it? You're just so bored you're glad to see any scoundrel. 'Welcome, welcome, eat as much as you like, only distract us in our idleness, help us to kill time, and let us have a look at you. At least it's something new. And we don't grudge the food—it costs us nothing whatever.' A most unpleasant virtue!"

And Alexander went to bed trying to decide what sort of a person his uncle really was. He went over the whole conversation in his memory—there was much he could not understand, and much that he did not quite believe.

"I say the wrong things," he pondered. "Love and friendship are not eternal! I wonder if my uncle is making fun of me? Can it really be that such customs prevail here? Why, it was my eloquence that Sophia liked best of all in me! And could it be that her love is not eternal? And don't people really eat supper here?"

He lay tossing in his bed for a long time, his head full of alarming thoughts, his empty stomach keeping him awake.

Two weeks passed.

Pyotr Ivanich grew more pleased with his nephew with every day.

"He is not at all tactless," he told one of his partners, "which is surprising in a country boy. He never forces himself on me, never comes without an invitation. And as soon as he notices that he is in the way he goes. And he never asks for money. He's a quiet fellow. A bit eccentric—always trying to kiss me—and holds forth like a divinity student, but he'll shake all that off. Thank goodness, I don't have to support him."

"Any fortune?" asked the other.

"No. About a hundred souls."

"Well! If he's clever he'll get on here. You yourself began in a small way, and now, thank God—"

"Oh, no! Not he! He'll never do anything. That silly enthusiasm will get him nowhere—forever oh-ing and ah-ing! He'll never get used to things here. What sort of a career can he make? He should never have come—oh, well, it's his own business!"

Alexander considered it his duty to love his uncle, but he could not get used to his character and cast of mind.

"My uncle seems to be good-natured," he wrote one morning to Pospelov, "he's very clever, but he's rather a prosaic person, always absorbed in business and accounts. His spirit is chained to the earth and never rises to pure contemplation, freed from all earthly considerations, of the spiritual nature of man. For him the heavens are closely bound up with the earth, and it seems as if he and

I will never mingle our souls. I thought, when I came here, that, being my uncle, he would give me a place in his heart, would warm me in the midst of the cold-hearted crowd, with the embraces of friendship. And friendship, as we know, is *another providence*. But he is himself the very embodiment of this crowd. I thought he and I would spend our time together, would never be parted for a moment, but what did I find? Cold advice, which he calls practical. But I would rather it were unpractical, and full of warm, cordial sympathy. It isn't that he's proud, but he is opposed to any sincere effusions. We neither dine nor sup together, and never go anywhere. When he comes home he never tells me where he has been or what he has been doing, just as he never tells me where he is going, and what for, who his friends are, what are his likes and dislikes, how he spends his time. He never gets particularly angry, is never affectionate, melancholy, or gay. His heart is stranger to the impulses of love and friendship, to aspirations towards the beautiful. You can hold forth like a prophet, almost as well as our great, unforgettable Ivan Semyonich, when—do you remember?—he thundered from the chair, and his fiery glances and words made us tremble with enthusiasm. But my uncle just listens with his eyebrows raised and looks at me queerly, or laughs in a way he has, a laugh that makes my blood freeze—and farewell, inspiration! Sometimes I seem to see Pushkin's Demon in him. He does not believe in *love* and that sort of thing, says there is no such thing as happiness, that no one ever promised it to man, and that there is nothing but everyday life, divided equally into good and evil, pleasure, health, success, anxiety, tranquillity, and then boredom, misery, sickness and so on, that we must learn to regard everything simply, and not cram our heads with useless (think of it, useless!) questions as



to why we were created, and what we aspire to, that all that is not our business, and that it prevents us from seeing what lies under our nose, and attending to our own business—he talks of nothing but business. It's impossible to make out whether he is absorbed in pleasure, or in mere prosaic business matters. He's always the same, whether sitting over accounts, or at the theatre. He does not go in for violent emotions, and seems neither to know, nor to care for, the beautiful. It is alien to his soul. I don't even believe he has read Pushkin—”

Pyotr Ivanich suddenly appeared in his nephew's room, and found him writing a letter.

“I've come to see how you're getting on here,” he said, “and to discuss business.”

Alexander sprang up and hastily covered some object with his hand.

“Put it away, do, if it's a secret!” said Pyotr Ivanich. “I'll look the other way. Well—have you put it away? Something's fallen out. What is it?”

“Nothing, Uncle,” began Alexander, but broke off in confusion.

“A lock of hair, if I am not mistaken. Most decidedly nothing. Well, since I've seen that, show me what is hidden in your hand.”

Alexander, like a schoolboy caught doing something naughty, reluctantly opened his hand and displayed a ring.

“What's that? Where did it come from?” asked Pyotr, Ivanich.

“That, Uncle, is a tangible sign of intangible relations.”

“What, what? Hand it over, your tangible sign.”

“It's a token of—”



"You brought it from the country, probably."

"It's from Sophia, Uncle, a keepsake when we said farewell."

"So that's what it is! And is this what you carried with you over a thousand miles?"

Pyotr Ivanich shook his head.

"You should have brought another sack of dried raspberries instead. They can at least be sold to the store-keeper, but these tokens of yours—"

He glanced from the lock of hair to the ring. The hair he sniffed at, and the ring he weighed in his hand. Then he took a piece of paper from the table, wrapped up both tokens in it, made a compact ball of it all and flung it out of the window.

"Uncle!" screamed Alexander, seizing his arm, but it was too late. The ball flew over the corner of a neighbouring roof, landed on a barge on the canal below, rebounded, and fell into the water.

Alexander looked in silence at his uncle, with an expression of bitter reproach.

"Uncle!" he repeated.

"Well?"

"How am I to designate such an act?"

"As the throwing out of the window of intangible signs and all sorts of rubbishy trifles which ought not to be kept in your room."

"Trifles! that's what you call trifles!"

"And what did you think they were? A half of your heart? I come to speak to him on business, and what do I find him doing? Sitting and thinking about all sorts of rubbish!"

"And does that interfere with business, Uncle?"

"Greatly. Time is passing and you still haven't said a word to me of your intentions—whether you wish to

go to work, or have chosen some other occupation—not a word! And all because your head is full of Sophia and signs. I suppose that's a letter to her you were writing, isn't it?"

"Well, I had just begun."

"And have you written to your mother?"

"Not yet—I was going to write to her tomorrow."

"Why tomorrow? Tomorrow for your mother, and for Sophia, whom you are bound to forget in a month's time—today!"

"Sophia! As if I could forget her!"

"You're bound to. If I hadn't thrown away your tokens you might perhaps have remembered her an extra month. I have done you a double service. In a few years those tokens would have reminded you of a folly which would have made you blush."

"Blush for such pure, sacred memories? That would mean to deny the meaning of poetry."

"What's the poetry in folly? The sort of poetry there is in your aunt's letter, I suppose. A yellow flower, a lake, some mystery. You can't think how sick it made me feel to read it! I almost blushed, and I am certainly not in the habit of blushing any more."

"Uncle, that's terrible! Does it mean you have never loved?"

"I can't stand tokens."

"Why, there's no more soul in that sort of life than there is in a block of wood!" exclaimed Alexander in violent agitation. "It's a searing frost, not life! To vegetate 'without inspiration, without tears, without life, without love—'"

"And without locks of hair!" added his uncle.

"How can you mock so callously at what is the best thing on earth, Uncle? Why, it's a crime—love ... sacred trepidation!"

"I know your sacred love—at your age you think of nothing but locks of hair, slippers, garters; if you so much as touch a hand—sacred, elevated love runs through your whole being, and if you had your own way you'd—Your love, unfortunately, is still to come. Nobody escapes it, but business may escape from you if you do not take it up."

"And is not love part of our business?"

"No. It's a pleasing distraction, and one shouldn't give up too much time to it, or everything will go wrong. That's why I fear for you."

Pyotr Ivanich shook his head.

"I have almost found you a place. You want to go to work, don't you?"

"Oh, Uncle, how glad I am!"

Alexander sprang up and imprinted a kiss on his uncle's cheek.

"Seized the opportunity!" said his uncle, wiping his cheek. "How is it I was caught unawares? Now listen to me. Tell me what you know, and what you feel yourself capable of."

"I know divinity, civil, criminal, natural and public law, diplomacy, political economy, philosophy, esthetics, archaeology—"

"Stop! Stop! Can you write Russian decently? That's what's chiefly wanted nowadays."

"What a strange question, Uncle! Can I write Russian?" exclaimed Alexander, running over to the chest-of-drawers and taking from it a heap of papers, his uncle in the meantime picking up a letter from the table and beginning to read it.

Alexander came back to the table with his papers, and saw his uncle reading his letter. The papers fell from his grasp.

"What's that you're reading, Uncle?" he asked in alarm.

"I found a letter lying here—to a friend, I suppose. Sorry—I only wanted to see what your writing was like."

"And have you read it?"

"Almost—there are only two lines left, let me finish it. What's the matter? There can't be any secrets in it, or you wouldn't have left it lying about like that."

"What must you think of me now?"

"I think you write fairly well—correctly and smoothly."

"So you haven't read it?" asked Alexander eagerly.

"I seem to have read it all," said Pyotr Ivanich, running his eyes over the two pages. "You begin by describing Petersburg, your impressions, and then myself."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Alexander, covering his face with his hands.

"What's the matter with you?"

"And you can say that calmly? You are not angry, you don't hate me?"

"Not at all! Why should I work myself up?"

"Say it again—calm me!"

"Of course I'm not!"

"I simply can't believe it! Prove it to me, Uncle."

"What d'you want me to do?"

"Embrace me!"

"Sorry! I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because there would be no reason, or rather no sense in it, or, to use the words of your professor, my consciousness does not impel me to it. If you were a woman, now, it would be different. There one acts without reason, moved by quite other impulses."

"Feelings strive for release, Uncle, demand impulsive acts, effusions—"

"They do not seek release or demand anything in my case, if they did I would restrain them—and I would advise you to do the same."

"But why?"

"So that afterwards, when you come to know the person better whom you have embraced, you should not blush for your embrace."

"And has it never happened to you, Uncle, to repel a person, and later regret it?"

"It has. And therefore I never repel anyone."

"Not even me—for such an act? You won't call me a monster?"

"According to you, everyone who writes nonsense must be a monster. I'm afraid there'd be a great many monsters if this were so."

"But to read such home truths about oneself—and from your own nephew!"

"You think you have written the truth?"

"Oh, Uncle! Of course I was mistaken—I will alter it. Forgive me!"

"Shall I dictate you the truth?"

"Please do!"

"Sit down, then, and write."

Alexander drew a sheet of note-paper towards him and picked up his pen, and Pyotr Ivanich, glancing at the letter he had just read, dictated:

"Dear Friend—got that?"

"Yes."

"I will refrain from describing Petersburg and the impression it made on me."

"On me," repeated Alexander, writing.

"Petersburg has been described long ago, and what has not been described must be seen for oneself. My impressions are worth nothing. There is no point in wasting time

and paper on them. I will describe my uncle instead, for this refers to me personally."

"Uncle!" interjected Alexander.

"Well, you wrote that I am very good-natured and clever—perhaps I am, perhaps I'm not. Let's begin from the middle. Write! My uncle is neither stupid nor bad-tempered, and wishes me well—"

"Uncle! I am capable of appreciating it, I feel it!" exclaimed Alexander, reaching over to kiss him.

"—Although he is not forever throwing his arms round my neck," said Pyotr Ivanich, continuing to dictate.

Alexander, unable to get at him, hastily sat down again.

"—And wishes me well, since he has neither cause nor desire to wish me ill, and because my mother, who once treated him kindly, asked him to look after me. He says he does not love me—and with good reason: it is impossible to love anyone after only knowing him a fortnight, and I don't love him yet, though I say I do."

"How can you!" exclaimed Alexander.

"Go on writing! But we are getting used to one another. He says it is possible to do without love altogether. He does not sit with his arms round me from morning till night, because this would be quite unnecessary. Besides he has no time for it.

"... opposed to sincere effusions,' that can stay, that's good. Have you got that?"

"Yes."

"Well, what else is there here? 'Prosaic son! ... demon—' Go on!"

While Alexander wrote, Pyotr Ivanich picked up a bit of paper from the desk, twisted it into a spill, set light to it, and lit his cigar, after which he threw the paper down and stamped on it.

"My uncle is neither a demon nor an angel, but a man like everyone else," he dictated, "but he's not quite like you and me. He thinks and feels on terrestrial terms, considering that, since we dwell upon the earth, we ought not to fly up into the sky, where so far no one has invited us, but should occupy ourselves with human affairs, to which we are called. And therefore he takes all terrestrial affairs and also life itself, for what they are, and not for what we should like them to be. He believes in the existence of good and of evil, the beautiful and the hideous. He believes also in love and friendship, but he does not think they have fallen from heaven into the dirt, supposing rather, that they were created at the same time as human beings, and for human beings, and must be understood in this sense, and that we should examine things closely in their true light, and not soar away, God knows where. He admits the possibility of attachments between honourable men, which, from frequent contacts and habit, may grow into friendship. But he considers, also, that during separation habit loses its force and people forget one another, and that this is by no means a crime. He therefore assures me that I will forget you, and you, me. This seems very strange to me, and to you also probably, but he advises us to get accustomed to the idea, in order not to make fools of ourselves. He has a similar opinion of love, with slight modifications—he does not believe in constant, eternal love any more than he believes in hobgoblins, and advises us not to, either. He advises me, by the way, to devote as little thought to this as possible, and I advise you to do the same. He says it will come of itself, without being summoned. He says life does not consist in that alone, but that, like everything else, there is a time for it, and it is foolish to spend ages dreaming of nothing but love. Those who seek it and cannot for a mo-



ment dispense with it, live by the heart, and, what is still worse, at the expense of the mind. My uncle is fond of business, and advises me to cultivate it also, which advice I hand on to you. We belong to society, he says, which is in need of us. And while doing business, he does not forget his own interests. Business brings money, and money—comforts, of which he is very fond. Besides, he may have certain intentions, owing to which I shall probably not be his heir. My uncle is not always thinking of his work and his factory, he knows other poets by heart, as well as Pushkin—”

“You, Uncle!” exclaimed Alexander in surprise.

“Yes. You’ll find it out for yourself one day. Go on: he reads in two languages everything of any note regarding all branches of human knowledge that comes out, loves art, has a fine collection of pictures of the Flemish school—that is his taste—frequently visits the theatre, but does not fuss and bustle about, or moan and groan, for he considers this puerile and that we must restrain our impulses, refrain from imposing our impressions on others, because no one has the slightest use for them. He does not use extravagant language, which he advises me also not to do, and I advise you. Good-bye, write to me as seldom as possible, and do not waste your time. Your friend, *et cetera*. And now, the month and the date.” •

“How can I send such a letter?” asked Alexander. “‘Write as seldom as possible!’—and this to one who travelled over a hundred miles for the sole purpose of saying a last farewell! ‘I advise you to do this, that, and the other.’ He’s just as clever as I am, he graduated second in the examination lists at the university.”

“Never mind—send it. Perhaps it’ll make him wiser. It will give rise to all sorts of new ideas in his mind. You

may have graduated from the university, but your real schooling is only just beginning."

"I can't bring myself to send it, Uncle."

"I never interfere in other people's affairs, but you asked me yourself to do something for you. I am trying to get you into the right path and make your first steps easier, and you resist me stubbornly. Well, just as you like—I only tell you my opinion, I'm not forcing you. I'm not your nurse."

"Forgive me, Uncle. I am ready to obey you," said Alexander and sealed up the letter with no more ado.

He then looked round for the other letter—to Sophia. It was neither on the table, under the table, nor in the drawer.

"What are you looking for?" his uncle asked.

"I'm looking for the other letter—to Sophia."

His uncle began helping him to look for it.

"Where can it be?" he said. "I didn't throw it out of the window—'pon my word I didn't!"

"Uncle! What have you done? You lit your cigar with it!" said Alexander mournfully, gathering up the scorched fragments of his letter.

"Did I?" exclaimed his uncle. "How could I have done that? And I never even noticed. Fancy burning such a treasure! And yet—d'you know what? In one respect it's all for the best."

"Really, Uncle, I can't see in what respect it could be for the best," said Alexander despairingly.

"It is—really, it is. You won't have time to write to her by this post any more, and by the time the next goes you'll probably have changed your mind, you'll be busy with your work. You'll have other things to think of, and thus you will have committed one folly less."

"But what will she think of me?"

"Whatever she likes. And I believe it will be good for her, too. You don't mean to marry her, do you? She will think you have forgotten her, and will forget you in her turn, and not have so much to blush for when she meets her future fiancé, and assures him that she has never loved anyone but him."

"You're an extraordinary man, Uncle! Constaney does not exist for you, promises are not sacred. Life is so beautiful, so full of delights and pleasures. Like a smooth, enchanting lake—"

"In which grow yellow flowers, of course," interrupted his uncle.

"Like a lake," continued Alexander, "life is full of something mysterious and alluring, concealing so much—"

"Slime, my friend."

"Why must you dig up the slime, Uncle? Why destroy all the joys, hopes, blessings? Why always look on the dark side?"

"I look on the real side—and advise you to do the same, then you won't make a fool of yourself. Your attitude to life is very well in the country, where people know nothing about life, and where not people, but angels live. Zayezhalov is a saint, your aunt is a lofty, sensitive soul. Sophia is just as big a fool as your aunt, and probably they are both—"

"Go on, Uncle!" exclaimed the infuriated Alexander.

"—Both dreamers like you, no doubt. Always sniffing round after eternal friendship and love. For the hundredth time I tell you—you should never have come here."

"As if she would assure her fiancé that she has never loved before!" said Alexander, almost as if speaking to himself.

"Still thinking of that?"

"On the contrary, I am sure she will show him, with noble frankness, my letters and—"

"Tokens," put in Pyotr Ivanich.

"Yes, and the tokens of our relations. And she will say to him: 'This was he who first touched my heart-strings. This is the name to which they first responded.'"

Pyotr Ivanich's eyebrows shot up, and his eyes opened wide. Alexander fell silent.

"Well, have you stopped harping on your strings? All I can say, dear boy, is that your Sophia will be a ninny if she does anything of the sort. I trust she has a mother, or somebody who can stop her."

"And you can call this, the most sacred impulse of the soul, this noble effusion of the heart folly, Uncle? What am I to think of you?"

"Whatever you like. She would make her fiancé suspect God knows what. Why, the marriage might be broken off—and what for? Just because you once picked yellow flowers together! That's not the way business is done! Well, since you can write good Russian, we'll go to the office tomorrow. I have mentioned you to one of my former colleagues there, the head of a department. He says there's a vacancy. There's no time to lose. What's that bundle of papers in your hands?"

"My university notes. Allow me to read you a few pages from Ivan Semyonich's lecture on Greek art."

He was already hastily turning over the pages.

"Oh, spare me, please!" cried Pyotr Ivanich, wrinkling up his features. "And what's that?"

"Oh, that's my thesis! I should like to show it to my future chief. There's one project in particular, worked out by me."

"Oh! Oh! One of those projects which were carried out a thousand years ago, or which can never and should never be carried out."

"Why, Uncle! It was shown to a very prominent person, a great advocate of education. He actually invited the rector and myself to dinner because of it. And here's the beginning of another."

"Have two dinners with me, only don't finish any more projects!"

"But why not?"

"Because you won't write anything that's any good now, and time will pass."

"What? After all the lectures I've attended!"

"They'll come in handy in time, but now you must observe, read, learn, and do what you're told."

"How is the chief to know what I can do?"

"He'll know at once. He's a dab at that. And what post would you like to occupy?"

"I don't know, Uncle, what to—"

"There are ministers," said Pyotr Ivanich, "deputy ministers, directors, vice-directors, heads of departments, head clerks, their assistants, clerks with special duties. Isn't that a wide enough choice for you?"

Alexander pondered. He lost his head, confronted by such a choice.

"I might as well start as a head clerk," he said.

"You might!" agreed Pyotr Ivanich.

"I could get used to the work, Uncle, and in a month or two I might become the head of a department."

Pyotr Ivanich pricked up his ears.

"Of course, of course!" he said. "And in another three months you could become a director, and a year after—let us say—a minister. Would that suit you?"

Alexander flushed, but said nothing.

"Didn't the head of the department tell you what the vacancy was?" he asked after a pause.

"No," replied his uncle. "He didn't say what it was, and anyhow we'd better leave it to him. You see how hard you find it to make a choice, and he knows what would be best. Don't tell him about your difficulty in choosing, and not a word about your projects, either. He might be offended at your not trusting him, and give you a blowing up. He's very severe. And I would not advise you to speak to the Petersburg *belles* about tangible tokens—they wouldn't understand you. How could they? It would be above their heads. I could hardly understand you myself, and they would only pull faces."

While his uncle was speaking, Alexander kept turning a bundle of papers over and over in his hands.

"What's that you're holding?"

Alexander had been awaiting this question with impatience.

"It's ... I've been wanting to show you for a long time ... some verses. You asked me about them once."

"I don't seem to remember. I don't think I asked you."

"You see, Uncle, I regard work in an office as a very prosaic occupation, in which the soul has no part, and the soul thirsts to express itself, to share with its fellow-men the feelings and ideas with which it overflows—"

"Well, and what about it?" asked his uncle impatiently.

"I feel that creative work is my vocation."

"You wish to do something over and above office work—is that how your words may be interpreted? Well, highly laudable. What do you want to go in for—literature?"

"Yes, Uncle. I wanted to ask you if you ever had an opportunity to get something published."

"And are you sure you have talent? Without it you will merely be an unskilled labourer in the field of art, and what's the good of that? If you have talent—that's another matter. It would be worth while working. You



can do a lot of good. That's capital—worth a great deal more than your hundred souls."

"Do you measure that by money, too?"

"How else? The more people read what you write, the more money you will be paid."

"And fame? Fame is the true reward of the songster."

"Fame is tired of looking after songsters. There are too many candidates. In the old days fame, like a woman, made up to everyone, but now—you may have noticed—she seems to have vanished, to have hidden herself. Notoriety exists, but somehow one doesn't hear a word about fame. Or can it be that she has invented a new way of showing herself—those who write best get the most money, and it's no use for those who don't write so well to be angry. Good writers, however, have a good life nowadays, they don't freeze and die of starvation in attics, even if people don't run after them in the street any more and point at them as if they were court jesters. People have discovered that a poet is no heavenly denizen but a human being who looks, walks, thinks and commits follies just like the rest of us. So why gape at him?"

"Like the rest of us—oh, Uncle! How can you say so? A poet bears a special imprint—a higher power dwells in his bosom."

"Just as it sometimes does in others—in a mathematician, a watchmaker, and in us factory owners. Newton, Gutenberg, Watt were just as much endowed with higher powers as Shakespeare, Dante and the rest. If I ever manage to improve our Pargolovo clay by some means, so that it can be made to produce better porcelain than Saxonian or Sèvres ware, don't you think this would prove the existence of higher powers?"

"You confound art with crafts, Uncle."



"God forbid! Art is one thing, and crafts are another, but the creative principle may dwell in both, or in neither. If it does not, the craftsman is called a craftsman and not an artist, and the poet is not a poet, but a mere poetaster. Didn't they tell you that in the university? What *did* you learn there?"

Pyotr Ivanich was quite vexed with himself for having condescended to explain such a commonly accepted truth.

"Too much like sincere effusions," he told himself. Aloud he said, "Show me what you have there. Poetry?"

He took the bundle and ran his eyes over the first page:

*Whence come these grievous meditations  
Which float in an uncalled-for crowd?  
Which slay desires and aspirations—*

"Give me a light, Alexander."

After lighting a cigar he resumed his reading:

*And in deep gloom our hearts enshroud?  
Why on a sudden do dark sorrows  
Immerse the soul in heavy sleep?  
What undeterminable horrors  
All unauares upon us creep?*

"The same thing spun out to four verses—well diluted!" remarked Pyotr Ivanich, and read on:

*Which of us mortal men can know  
Why suddenly the dew-like tears  
Appear upon the paling brow?*

"What's this? *Sweat* appears on the brow, but I never saw *tears* there."

*A sign that unknown evil nears,  
Beneath the silence of the skies  
Some dread and awful meaning lies.*

“‘Dread’ and ‘awful’ mean the same thing.”

*I watched the sky—a pallid sphere—*

“Ah, the inevitable moon! No getting along without it! If you rhyme daydream and maiden, you are lost—I give you up.”

*I watch the sky—a pallid sphere,  
The moon floats past, in silence bound,  
And something seems to say that here  
The fatal mystery is found.*

“Not bad! Give me a light again, my cigar’s out. Where was I? Oh, yes:

*The grimly silent stars that dot  
The mystical nocturnal height  
Seem joining in an evil plot  
And glitter with deceitful light.  
Although to some the restful night  
Their souls with calm may seem to fill,  
The sleeping world is full of spite,  
All in the Universe bodes ill.  
That gnawing sorrow bears no name—”*

Pyotr Ivanich yawned portentously, and continued:

*But grief may disappear like flame,  
That burns a while, then fades and dies,  
Subsiding never more to rise.*

He now began gabbling, almost to himself:

*And then, perchance, another sprite  
Makes its abode within our minds,  
And then a feeling of delight  
Its way into our spirit finds.*

"Neither good nor bad," he said, when he had come to the end. "After all, some people began worse. Go on, write, work at it, if that's what you like. Perhaps you will show talent. Then things will be different."

Alexander was saddened. He had expected quite a different appraisal. He found, however, a slight consolation in regarding his uncle as a cold, almost soulless being.

"And here's a translation from Schiller," he said.

"Good. I see it is. Do you know languages, too?"

"I know French, German, and a little English."

"Well done—why didn't you tell me before? You may come to something, after all. You told me about political economy, philosophy, archaeology, and God knows what else, and never said a word about the most important of all—misplaced modesty. I'll find your literary work immediately."

"Will you, Uncle? I shall be most grateful to you! Let me embrace you!"

"Wait till I've found you something."

"Won't you show some of my works to my future chief, to give him an idea of what I can do?"

"No, no! If necessary you can show them to him yourself, but perhaps it won't be. Will you make me a present of your projects and other writings?"

"Will I? Why, of course, Uncle!" exclaimed Alexander, flattered by his uncle's request. "Shall I make a list of all of them in chronological order?"

"No, don't trouble. Thanks for the gift. Yevsei! Give these papers to Vasily!"

"Why to Vasily? Let him take them to your study."

"He was asking me for some paper to line trunks with or something the other day."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Alexander in horror, snatching back the bundle of papers.

"But you gave them to me, it's none of your business what use I make of your present."

"Nothing is sacred to you, nothing!" groaned Alexander, pressing the papers to his breast with both hands.

"Listen to me, Alexander," said Pyotr Ivanich, tearing them from his nephew's grasp, "this will prevent you from blushing later on, and you will thank me."

Alexander let go of the bundle.

"Here you are, Yevsei, take them away!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "Well, now it's nice and clean in your room—no more rubbish in it. It will depend on yourself whether it is filled with a lot of litter, or with something useful. We'll drive to the factory for a breath of fresh air, and see how the work is going."

The next morning Pyotr Ivanich took his nephew to the office, and while he chatted with his friend, the head of the department, Alexander acquainted himself with this world, so new to him. He was dreaming all the time about his projects, and cudgelling his brains over the question as to what state problem he would be given to solve, but in the meantime he stood there looking around him.

"It's just like my uncle's factory!" was the conclusion he finally came to. "There, one man picks up a lump of clay, flings it into the maw of the machine, turns it a few times, until out comes a cone, an oval, or a round, then passes it on to the next man, who dries it over the fire and hands it to a third who gilds it, after which a fourth draws the design on it, and there emerges a cup, a vase, or a saucer. And here—in comes some strange petitioner, stooping low with a pitiful smile as he hands in his paper, one man takes it, gives it a slight touch with his pen and hands it to another, who throws it on the top of a thousand other papers, where, however, it is not lost; with a number and date stamped on it it passes

unhurt through a score of hands, all the while increasing and multiplying others of its own kind. A third man picks it up and opens some cupboard, peeps into a book or another paper, utters a few cabalistic words to a fourth, whose pen immediately starts squeaking busily. When his pen has finished squeaking the fourth man hands on the parent document, with yet another infant affixed to it, to a fifth man, whose pen also squeaks industriously, and another paper is born, and the paper goes on and on, and never gets lost—its originators may die, but it will go on living for another hundred years. Even after it has long been covered with the dust of ages it may still be disturbed and consulted. And day by day, hour by hour, today, tomorrow, for ever and ever, the bureaucratic machine goes on working smoothly, uninterruptedly, never resting, as if there were no such thing as human beings—only wheels and cogs.

“Where is the mind animating and setting in motion this paper factory?” wondered Alexander. “Is it in books, in the papers themselves, or in the heads of these people?”

And the faces! You do not see such faces in the street, their owners do not seem to show themselves in the daylight. It is here, apparently, that they are born and bred, growing up with their posts, and dying at them. Alexander took a good look at the department chief. Like thundering Jove he had only to open his mouth, for some Mercury, his breast adorned with a glittering copper disc, to come running up immediately. He had only to hold out his hand with some paper in it, and a dozen hands were stretched out to receive it.

“Ivan Ivanich!” he said.

Ivan Ivanich sprang from his seat at a desk, hastened up to Jove, and stood before him as stiff as a poker. Alex-

ander was seized with trepidation, though he could not have said why.

"Give me a pinch of snuff."

With eager servility Ivan Ivanich held out the open snuff-box in both his hands.

"Oh, and examine that one!" said the chief, pointing to Aduyev.

"So that's who is to examine me!" thought Alexander, glancing at the rusty figure of Ivan Ivanich, and the rubbed elbows of his coat sleeves. "Can it be that such a man solves state problems?"

"Have you a good hand?" asked Ivan Ivanich.

"Hand?"

"Yes—handwriting. Be so good as to copy out this paper."

Alexander, though astonished at the demand, did as he was asked. Ivan Ivanich screwed up his features when he saw what Alexander had written.

"Writes badly," he reported to the head of the department, who also glanced at the paper.

"Yes—no good! Can't make a fair copy. Let him copy out permits for a start, and when he gets used to that you can put him on filling in forms. Perhaps he'll do—he's had a university education."

Very soon Aduyev, too, had become a cog in the machine. He wrote, wrote endlessly, and could no longer understand how anything else could be done of a morning. The memory of his projects now only brought a blush to his cheeks.

"You were right about that, Uncle," he said to himself. "Ruthlessly right. Can it be you were right about everything else? Can it be that I have been mistaken in my secret, inspired thoughts, in my passionate belief in

love, friendship, people, and in myself? What is the meaning of life?"

He bent over his paper and his pen squeaked still more loudly, while tears gleamed on his eyelashes.

"Fortune positively smiles on you," Pyotr Ivanich told his nephew. "When I started I had to work a whole year without a salary, and you begin straight away at senior rates. That comes to seven hundred and fifty rubles, and awards will bring it up to a thousand. A very good start! The head of the department speaks well of you, but says you are absent-minded—sometimes you forget to put in commas, sometimes you leave out the contents of a document. You must pull yourself together. The great thing is to attend to what is going on around you, and not soar away goodness knows where."

Pyotr Ivanich pointed upwards. From now on he became still more affectionate in his manner to his nephew.

"What a wonderful man our head clerk is, Uncle!" said Alexander one day.

"What makes you think so?"

"We have become very friendly. Such an elevated soul, such pure, noble ideas! And the assistant, too—he seems to be a man of iron will and firm character."

"Have you become friends with him in such a short time?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Has the head clerk invited you to his Thursday evenings?"

"Most pressingly! Every Thursday. He seems to have taken a fancy to me."

"And has the assistant asked you for a loan?"

"Yes, Uncle—a mere trifle. I gave him twenty-five rubles that I had on me. He asked me for another fifty."



"Oh, you gave him some! Ah!" said Pyotr Ivanich in vexation. "It's partly my fault for not warning you. I didn't know you were simpleton enough to lend money after a fortnight's acquaintance. Can't be helped—we'll go shares. You can consider I owe you twelve rubles fifty."

"But, Uncle, surely he'll return it?"

"Not he! I know him. He has owed me a hundred rubles ever since I worked there. He borrows from everyone. Next time he asks you, tell him I asked him to remember his debt to me—he'll leave you alone. And mind you don't go to the head clerk's house!"

"Why not, Uncle?"

"He's a gambler. He'll place you beside a couple of fellows like himself, and between them they'll leave you penniless."

"A gambler?" repeated Alexander in amazement. "Is it possible? He seemed to be so addicted to sincere effusions."

"And while talking to him, you can let it slip out that I have taken charge of all your money, and then you'll see how fond he is of sincere effusions and whether he'll ever invite you to his home again of a Thursday."

Alexander fell into deep thought. His uncle shook his head.

"Did you really think you were surrounded by angels?" he said. "'Sincere effusions! Taken a fancy to you! 'Apparently it never occurred to you before to wonder if there weren't any scoundrels among them. You should never have come here! Really you shouldn't have!'"

One day, just after Alexander had waked up, Yevsei handed him a large envelope and a note from his uncle.

"Here's some literary work for you at last," he wrote. "I met a journalist friend yesterday, and he gave me something for you to try your hand at."

Alexander's hands shook with excitement as he opened the envelope. It contained a manuscript in German.

"What's this?" he said. "Prose? What's it about?"

He read the pencilled inscription at the top:

"*The Soil*, an article for the agricultural department. Kindly translate as quickly as possible."

He studied the article long and thoughtfully, then, sighing, he slowly picked up his pen and began to translate. Two days later the article was finished and dispatched.

"Splendid! Splendid!" his uncle told him a few days later. "The editor is delighted, though he considers your style is not austere enough. But you can't expect everything straight away. He would like to make your acquaintance. Call on him tomorrow, in the evening, about seven—he has another article for you."

"On the same subject, Uncle?"

"No—another one. He told me what, but I've forgotten. Oh, yes—on *potatoes*! Really, Alexander, I think you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. I begin to hope that something may come of you, after all—perhaps I shall one day stop asking you what you came here for. A month has hardly passed, and everything seems to be coming your way. A thousand rubles' salary, an editor offering you a hundred rubles a folio—that comes to two thousand two hundred rubles. *I* didn't begin like that," he said, knitting his brows slightly. "Write to your mother that you have found work, and how. I'll answer her letter myself, and tell her that, remembering her kindness to me, I have done all I could for you."

"My mother will be ... very grateful to you, Uncle, and I am too," said Alexander, sighing, but he no longer tried to embrace his uncle.

### III

Over two years passed by. Who could have recognized our country bumpkin in this young man with the elegant manners and in smart attire? He has changed greatly and grown to manhood. The soft lines of his youthful face, the transparent delicacy of his skin, the down on his chin—all, all have disappeared, as have also his bashful timidity and the awkward grace of his movements. His features have matured, forming a countenance which displays character. The lilies and roses have vanished beneath a light tan. The down on his chin has been replaced by small whiskers. His light, springy gait has become firm and even. Some bass notes have been added to his voice. The sketch has developed into a finished portrait. The youth has become a man. Assurance and courage shines from his eyes—not the courage which makes itself heard a mile away, regards everything with arrogance, and says to all and sundry, by glance and manner: "Look, beware, do not touch, do not tread on my foot—or else ... I'll make short work of you!" The manifestation of the courage I am speaking of, far from repelling, attracts. It shows itself in aspirations towards good, towards success, in the desire to overcome all obstacles in its way. The former ecstatic expression of Alexander's face has been modified by a tinge of thoughtfulness, the first sign of the dawnings of scepticism in his soul, and perhaps the only result of his uncle's lessons, and of the merciless analysis to which the latter has subjected all that had formerly shown itself in Alexander's eyes and heart. At last Alexander has learned tact, that is, he has acquired the ability to handle people. He no longer rushes eagerly at everyone he meets, especially since, in his tendency to sincere effusions, he has, despite his uncle's warnings,

been rooked at cards a couple of times, while the man of iron will and firm character has managed to borrow no small sum of money from him. And other persons and occurrences have done much to help him. Here he has noticed that people poke fun on the sly at his youthful raptures, and call him a romantic. There, practically no attention is paid to him, since there is nothing to be gained by it. He gives no dinners, does not keep a carriage, does not play cards for high stakes.

At first Alexander's heart ached and mourned after each contact of his rosy dreams with reality. It never occurred to him to ask himself: what great thing I have done, to distinguish myself from the crowd? What are my merits and why should I be noticed? And yet his vanity suffered.

At last he gradually began to admit the thought that there are thorns as well as roses to be met with in life, and that the thorns sometimes inflict pain, though not so severe as his uncle had foretold. And at last he learned self-control and ceased giving way so frequently to impulse and emotion, checked his tendency towards high-flown language, at least in front of strangers.

But he was by no means able as yet, much to the distress of Pyotr Ivanich, to break up into component parts all which moves and stirs the soul of man. He would not as yet admit that all the mysteries and secrets of the heart could be brought to the light of day.

In the mornings Pyotr Ivanich would give him a regular lesson. Alexander listened, was sometimes embarrassed by it, sometimes plunged in profound meditation, and in the evening went off to some party and returned all in a flutter. The next day he would go about as in a dream, and his uncle's doctrines were consigned to the devil. The charm and intoxication of a ball-room, the thunder

of the band, the naked shoulders, fiery glances, the smiles from rosy lips kept him awake all night. The memory of a waist on which his hand had rested, a long languid glance which had followed him as he went away, the hot breath he had felt on his cheek during a waltz, the low words exchanged at a window, to the accompaniment of the mazurka's thunder, eyes which sparkled, ineffable nothings, passed before him in succession. His heart beat violently, and he embraced his pillow in feverish perturbation, tossing from side to side on his bed.

"Where is love? It is love I thirst for—love!" he said. "Will it come soon? When will those divine moments, those sweet sufferings, that blissful trepidation, tears, begin?" And all the rest of it.

He appeared before his uncle the next morning.

"Oh, what a party that was at the Zaráiskys' last night, Uncle!" he said, and fell to dreaming over the memories of the ball.

"Good, was it?"

"Divine!"

"Was the supper any good?"

"I didn't have any."

"What? At your age not to have supper when you can! I see you are getting accustomed to the way of life here in earnest, almost too much so. And was everything done in style? Dresses, lighting?"

"Indeed it was!"

"And the guests—were they a nice set of people?"

"Very, very nice! Such eyes, such shoulders!"

"Shoulders? Whose?"

"Weren't you asking about them?"

"About whom?"

"Why—the young ladies."

"No, I wasn't. But never mind—were there many pretty ones?"

"Ever so many—the only pity is that they are all so alike. Whatever one of them says and does in certain circumstances you may be sure the next one will do the same, like a lesson learned by heart. There was only one not exactly like the rest—but you never meet with the slightest independence or character. Movements, glances – all the same! You never hear an original idea, or catch a gleam of feeling—everything is covered with the same gloss. Nothing seems to summon their thoughts to the surface. Can it be that feeling will be suppressed forever, that it will never display itself to anyone? Will the corset crush for ever the sigh of love and the cry of an anguished heart? Will there never be any outlet for emotion?"

"It'll all come out before their husbands, and if everyone were to think aloud as you do, probably many girls would remain spinsters all their lives. There are silly little fools who reveal prematurely what should be concealed and suppressed—and what do they get for it but tears? They can't calculate."

"Calculations here, too, Uncle?"

"As everywhere else, my boy. Those who do not calculate are called incalculable fools in Russian. A clear-cut statement of fact."

"To suppress in one's bosom one's noblest impulses and emotions!"

"Oh, you will never suppress anything, I know that! You are ready—in the street, at the theatre—to fall sobbing on a friend's neck."

"And why not, Uncle? People would only say: there's a man with strong feelings, he who feels thus is capable of all that is lofty and noble, and is incapable of—"



"Incapable of calculating, that is to say, thinking. A fine figure—a man with strong feelings and vast passions! There are all sorts of natures, aren't there? Enthusiasm, exaltation! Such a one is quite unlike a human being and there's nothing to boast about in that. You should ask if he can control his emotions; if so, he's a man."

"According to you emotions need controlling as if they were steam," remarked Alexander. "Sometimes a little may be released, sometimes it must be shut off, the valve must be opened or closed—"

"Yes, not for nothing has nature given man this valve—it is reason, and you do not always make use of it, sad to say. And yet you're a decent chap."

"It's depressing to listen to you, Uncle. Introduce me to that lady who has just come to Petersburg, instead."

"Who? Lyubetskaya? Was she there last night?"

"Yes, and she talked about you a great deal, enquired about her affair."

"Oh, yes. By the way—"

Pyotr Ivanich took a paper out of a drawer.

"Take her this and tell her that only yesterday I managed to get it almost by force from the Chamber. Explain the matter to her thoroughly. You heard me talking to the official about it, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes. I'll explain it to her, don't worry."

Alexander seized the document with both his hands and put it in his pocket. Pyotr Ivanich looked at him.

"What makes you want to know her? I don't think she's particularly good-looking—she has a wart at the side of her nose."

"A wart? I don't remember. How did you come to notice it, Uncle?"



"Right at the side of her nose—as if one could help it. What is it you want with her?"

"She's so kind and worthy."

"So you didn't notice the wart on her nose, but you have discovered that she is kind and worthy? Funny! Wait a minute, though! She has a daughter, a little brunette. Ah! Now I understand! So that's why you didn't notice the wart on her nose."

They both laughed.

"And I can't understand, Uncle," said Alexander, "how you could notice the wart on her nose before you noticed her daughter."

"Give me back that paper. You'll probably pour out all your emotions and quite forget to close the valve, and make a mess of things, and I'm sure I don't know how you'll explain it."

"No, I won't, Uncle. And I don't mean to give you back the paper, whatever you say. I'll go at once."

And he left the room.

And things went on and on in due succession. At his office his superiors noticed Alexander's ability and gave him a good post. Ivan Ivanich began offering his snuff-box respectfully to him, foreseeing that, like many others who had, as he said, only been working a month of Sundays, Alexander would overtake him, work him to death, and then, no doubt, get made head of department and vice-director, like such a one, or even director, like another, both of whom had begun their official lives under his tuition. "And I must work for their success," he added. At the editorial office of the magazine Alexander had also become an important personage. He selected material, translated articles, and corrected those of others, even sending in contributions embodying his own views on the theory of agriculture. In his own opinion

he had money and to spare, but his uncle was still not content. And he did not only work for money. He had not given up the joyful thought of another, loftier vocation. His youthful ardour sufficed for everything. He stole time from sleep and office work and wrote poems, novels, historical essays and biographies. His uncle no longer papered the partition with his works, but read them in silence, after which he whistled, or declared: "Better than the one you first showed me." Some of his articles appeared under an assumed name and Alexander would listen in happy perturbation to the approving judgements of his friends, of whom he had any number, at the office, in the pastrycooks' shops, and in private houses. His fondest dream—next to the dream of love—was being fulfilled. The future offered him much brilliance, great triumphs. It seemed as if no ordinary lot awaited him, when suddenly—

Several months had passed. Alexander was scarcely ever seen anywhere, he seemed to have disappeared. He visited his uncle less frequently. The latter put this down to the fact that he was busy and let him alone. But one day the editor of the magazine, meeting Pyotr Ivanich, complained that Alexander was delaying an article. The uncle promised to speak to his nephew at the earliest opportunity. An opportunity arose two or three days later. Alexander rushed like a madman into his uncle's room one morning. Joyful excitement showed itself in his gait and all his movements.

"Good morning, Uncle! Oh, how glad I am to see you!" he said, and would have embraced Pyotr Ivanich if the latter had not retreated behind the table.

"Good morning, Alexander! Where have you been all this time?"

"I've been—busy, Uncle. I've been making compilations from German economists."

"Oh! So that editor was lying! The other day he told me you weren't doing anything—isn't that just like a journalist? I'll tell him what I think of him next time we meet."

"Don't say anything to him," interrupted Alexander. "I haven't sent him my work yet, that's what he meant."

"Why, what's the matter with you? You have such a triumphant look. Have they made you an assessor, or given you a cross?"

Alexander shook his head.

"Money, then?"

"No."

"Then what makes you look so triumphant? If it's not that, then don't get in my way, but sit down and write to Moscow, to the merchant Dubasov, to send the rest of the money as soon as possible. Read his letter—where is it? Oh, here it is!"

Both were silent a few moments, and then both began writing.

"I've finished," said Alexander a few minutes later.

"Very quick—well done! Let me see it. What's this? You've addressed it to me. 'Honoured Sir! Pyotr Ivanich!' His name is Timofei Nikonich. You've written 520 rubles—it's 5,200! What's the matter with you, Alexander?" Pyotr Ivanich laid down his pen and stared at his nephew. Alexander blushed.

"Don't you notice anything in my face?" he asked.

"You do look rather silly now you mention it. Wait a minute! Are you in love?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

Alexander made no reply.

"What is it then? Is it what I think?"

Alexander, with a smile of triumph and radiant glance, nodded affirmation.

"So that's it! I should have guessed at once. So that's what's made you lazy, that's why one never sees you anywhere! And all those Zaiskys and Skachins come round me asking: 'Wherever has Alexander Fyodorich got to?' And all the time he's in the seventh heaven!"

Pyotr Ivanich resumed his writing.

"It's Nadya Lyubetskaya," said Alexander.

"I didn't ask," said his uncle. "Whoever it is, it's folly. Which Lyubetskaya? The one with the wart on her nose?"

"Oh, Uncle!" Alexander interrupted him in vexation. "What wart?"

"Right on her nose. D'you mean to say you haven't yet noticed it?"

"You're mixing everything up. It's her mother who has a wart on her nose, I think."

"It's all the same."

"All the same! Nadya! She's an angel! Can it be you have not noticed her? To have seen her, and not to remember her—"

"What's so wonderful about her? What is there to notice? You say she hasn't got a wart on her nose."

"You can think of nothing but that wart. For shame, Uncle—surely nobody could say she was like those worldly, conventional puppets! Just take a look at her face—what profound, quiet thought dwells there! This is a thinking, not just a feeling girl ... a deep nature—"

His uncle's pen began to squeak over the paper, but Alexander continued.

"You will never hear from her lips the usual trivial commonplaces. What brilliancy of mind shines through her remarks! What fire in her emotions! How thoroughly

she understands life! You poison it by your views, but Nadya reconciles me to it."

Alexander paused, quite absorbed in his dreams of Nadya. Then he started off again:

"And when she lifts her eyes you see at once what a passionate, tender heart they serve. And her voice, her voice! How melodious, how voluptuous! And when this voice utters a declaration of love—what earthly bliss could be higher! Uncle! How beautiful life is! How happy I am!"

Tears came into his eyes; he embraced his uncle convulsively.

"Alexander!" exclaimed Pyotr Ivanich, springing to his feet. "Close that valve of yours immediately! All the steam is escaping! You are mad! Look what you've done! Committed two follies in a single moment—ruffled my hair and made me drop a blot on my letter. I thought you had quite given up those habits. You haven't been like this for a long time. Look at yourself in the mirror, pray do. Did you ever see such a stupid countenance? And yet you're not really stupid."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm happy, Uncle."

"That's obvious."

"Pride shines in my glance, doesn't it? I know it does. I gaze at the crowd as only a hero, a poet and a lover, happy in the consciousness of mutual love, could gaze."

"And as only a madman or someone still worse could.... Well—what am I to do about this letter?"

"Let me scrape it--it won't show," said Alexander.

He rushed up to the table and, with the same nervous energy, began scraping and rubbing till he made a hole in the paper. The table shook from all these movements, and knocked against the whatnot. On the whatnot was a bust of Sophocles or Aeschylus—in Italian alabaster.

The venerable tragedian bowed backwards and forwards several times on his unsteady pedestal, fell off the shelf, and was broken into smithereens.

"Your third folly, Alexander," said Pyotr Ivanich, gathering up the fragments. "That cost fifty rubles."

"I'll pay, Uncle, oh, I'll pay, only don't abuse my impulse! It was pure and noble. I am happy, happy! God, how beautiful life is!"

His uncle grimaced and shook his head.

"When will you learn wisdom, Alexander? What rubbish you talk!"

All this time he was regarding the broken bust ruefully.

"I'll pay," he says, "I'll pay." And that would be the fourth folly. I see you are burning to tell me of your happiness. Very well, then. Since an uncle is bound to participate in every folly perpetrated by his nephews, so let it be. I will give you a quarter of an hour. Sit still, don't commit a fifth folly, but tell me all about it, and then, after this new folly, go. I have no time to spare. Well—so you are happy, and what about it? Hurry up and tell me!"

"Such things cannot be put into words," remarked Alexander with a modest smile.

"I tried to help you, but I see you are still intent on beginning with the usual preamble. In that case your tale would take at least an hour. And I have no time. The post will not wait. Come now, I'd better do the telling myself."

"You—that would be amusing!"

"Highly amusing—listen, then! Yesterday you had a private interview with your beloved."

"How did you know?" interrupted Alexander eagerly. "Are you having me shadowed?"



"Of course I am—I engage paid spies for no other purpose! What makes you think I am so interested in what you do? What is it to me?"

These words were accompanied by an icy glance.

"Then how did you know?" asked Alexander, coming nearer to his uncle.

"Sit down, sit down, for God's sake, and keep away from the table, or you'll be breaking something else. It's all written on your face, I can read it from here. Well, so you proposed," he continued.

Alexander reddened, but said nothing. Evidently his uncle had hit the right nail on the head again.

"You were both very foolish in the accepted fashion," said Pyotr Ivanich.

His nephew made an impatient gesture.

"It all began with trifles when you found yourselves alone," said Pyotr Ivanich. "The pattern of her embroidery, say. You asked who it was for? She replied 'for Mamma or my aunt,' or something of the sort, and you were both trembling as if you had an ague—"

"You guessed wrong this time, Uncle. We didn't begin about the pattern of her embroidery, we were in the garden," said Alexander, and checked himself.

"Well then, about a flower or something," said Pyotr Ivanich. "It may even have been a yellow one, but never mind. Whatever your glance fell on, any excuse for talking, anything to loosen your tongue. You asked her if she liked this flower, she said, 'Yes.' 'And why?' you asked her. 'I just do,' she replied, and you both fell silent, because you wanted to say something quite different, and the conversation flagged. Then you looked at one another, smiled, blushed."

"Oh, Uncle, Uncle!" cried Alexander, highly embarrassed.



"Then," continued his uncle imperturbably, "you began telling her that a new world had opened before you. At this she looked up suddenly, as if it were a most surprising piece of news. You, I suppose, were taken aback, and lost your thread, and then began saying almost inarticulately that only now had you begun to understand the meaning of life, that up to now you had seen her—what's her name—Marya?"

"Nadya."

"But you had seen her as in a dream, had looked forward to meeting her again, that you had come to love her, and that you now, forsooth, dedicated to her alone all the poetry and prose you wrote.... And I can just imagine how you waved your hands about ... probably knocked something over, broke something."

"Uncle! You must have been eavesdropping!" shrieked Alexander, almost beside himself.

"Yes, I was hiding behind a bush. I have nothing else to do but run after you and listen to all sorts of rubbish."

"But how do you know all this?" asked the astonished Alexander.

"Easy enough. From the time of Adam and Eve everyone has gone through the same thing, with slight variations. When you know the characters of the *dramatis personae* you know the variations. This surprises you—and you a writer! For three days you will go about leaping and jumping like a madman, and falling on everybody's neck—only not on mine, for God's sake! I would advise you to lock yourself into your own room for this period, and there let all the steam escape, and play all your tricks on Yevsei, so that nobody sees. Then you will think things over, and try for something more—a kiss, for example."

"A kiss from Nadya! Oh, what a lofty, divine reward!" exclaimed Alexander with a sort of roar of ecstasy.

"Divine?"

"And do you consider it earthly?"

"Undoubtedly—the effect of electricity. Lovers are simply a pair of Leyden jars. They are both heavily charged, the kisses release the electricity, and when it is all exhausted, farewell love!—a cooling process begins."

"Uncle!"

"Well? And what did you think?"

"What an attitude! What ideas!"

"Oh, yes, I forgot—there are still 'tangible tokens' to be exchanged between you. You'll be bringing all sorts of rubbish home again, and dream over them and gaze at them, and forget all about your work."

Here Alexander clapped his hand to his pocket.

"What—already? You will do all that humanity has always done since the creation of the Universe."

"That means you did the same yourself, Uncle."

"Why, yes, only you are doing it still more foolishly."

"More foolishly! Do you call it folly that I love more profoundly, more intensely, than you did, Uncle, that I do not mock at feeling, do not jest at it, do not trifle with it callously, like you, do not tear the coverings from sacred mysteries?"

"You will love as others do, neither more profoundly nor more intensely. Like others you will tear the coverings from mysteries. But with the difference that you will believe love is eternal and immutable, and will think of nothing but love—and that is where you are foolish. You are storing up for yourself more sorrow than is absolutely necessary."

"What you say is appalling, Uncle! How many times have I sworn to myself that I would conceal from you the workings of my heart!"

"And why didn't you? Why did you come and get in my way?"

"But, Uncle, you are the only person near to me. With whom should I share this surplus emotion? And you ruthlessly plunge your surgeon's blade into the most secret mazes of my heart."

"I do not do it for my own pleasure. You asked my advice. How many follies have I withheld you from committing!"

"No, Uncle—I would rather appear eternally foolish in your eyes, than adopt such an attitude to life and human beings. That would be too painful, too sad for me. I do not need life, I do not desire it on such terms. I do not desire it—do you hear me?"

"I hear you. But what am I to do? I can't deprive you of life."

"Despite all your predictions, I will be happy," said Alexander. "I will love once and for ever!"

"And I foresee that you will break a lot more things on my table. But never mind! Everyone knows what love is. Nobody hinders you. We are not the first to discover that the young devote much time to love. But don't let it make you neglect your work. Love is one thing and business is another."

"But I am drawing up extracts from the German."

"Nonsense! You're doing nothing of the kind! You're simply indulging in 'blissful dreams,' and the editor will refuse to have anything to do with you."

"Let him. I am not in need. As if I could now think of contemptible advantage, when—"

"Oh—contemptible advantage! Contemptible! Why don't you build a hut in the mountains, live on bread and water, and declare:

*A wretched hovel shared with thee,  
To me a paradise would be.*

Only when you have no more 'filthy lucre,' don't come begging to me—I shan't give you any."

"I don't think I have often worried you."

"So far, thank God, you haven't, but it might happen, if you throw up your work. Love demands money, too—for dressing up and various other purposes. Oh, love at twenty! It's such a worthless emotion, oh how worthless it is—simply no good at all!"

"And when is it any good, Uncle? At forty?"

"I know nothing about love at forty—but love at thirty-nine—"

"Like your own?"

"Say, like my own."

"That is to say—no love!"

"How do you know?"

"As if you could love!"

"Why not? Am I not a human being, or am I eighty? But when I love it is rationally, I do not knock things over or break anything."

"Rational love! A fine love when a man knows exactly what he's about," remarked Alexander scornfully. "A love that never causes one to forget oneself for a moment."

"In violent, animal love," Pyotr Ivanich interrupted, "a man does not know what he is about, but in rational love, he does. Otherwise it is not love."

"What is it then?"

"Mere folly, as you would say."

"You ... in love," said Alexander, gazing incredulously at his uncle. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Pyotr Ivanich went on writing in silence.

"And with whom, Uncle?" asked Alexander.

"Do you want to know?"

"I do."

"With my betrothed."

"Your betrothed!" repeated Alexander, scarcely able to bring the words out; and springing up he approached his uncle.

"Not too near, Alexander, close your valve!" said Pyotr Ivanich, noting the wide-open eyes of his nephew and hastily drawing various small objects—small busts, statuettes, a clock and the ink-pot—towards himself.

"Do you mean you are going to get married?" asked Alexander in a tone of astonishment.

"I do."

"And you are so calm! Writing letters to Moscow, discussing all sorts of indifferent matters, going to your factory and still able to discuss love with such infernal coldness!"

"Infernal coldness—that's new! It's supposed to be hot in the nether regions. But why do you look at me like that?"

"You—are going to get married!"

"What is there so extraordinary about that?" asked Pyotr Ivanich, laying down his pen.

"Getting married! And without telling me a word!"

"Forgive me, I forgot to ask your permission."

"Not that, Uncle, but I ought to have been told. My own uncle is going to get married, and I know nothing about it, nobody tells me."

"Well, now I've told you."

"But only because the subject happened to come up," said Alexander. "I should have been the first to hear of your happiness. You know how I love you and share—"

"I avoid all sharing on principle, especially with reference to marriage."

"Listen, Uncle," said Alexander impetuously. "Perhaps ... but no, I cannot conceal anything from you. It's not my way, I will tell you all—"

"Oh, Alexander, I'm too busy—if it's a new story, couldn't it wait till tomorrow?"

"I only wanted to say that perhaps I too am near the same happiness."

"What?" exclaimed Pyotr Ivanich, pricking up his ears. "This promises to be interesting."

"Interesting, is it? Then I will tease you—I won't tell!"

Pyotr Ivanich picked up an envelope with the utmost indifference, put his letter into it, and began sealing it.

"Perhaps I too am going to be married," Alexander said, close to his uncle's ear.

Pyotr Ivanich stopped sealing his letter and looked at him very gravely.

"Close the valve, Alexander!" he said.

"Joke away, Uncle, but I am in earnest. I am going to ask Mamma's permission."

"You to get married?"

"Why not?"

"At your age!"

"I'm twenty-three."

"And time to get married, you think. At that age only peasants marry, when they need a woman to look after them."

"But if I am in love with a girl and in a position to marry, do you consider we should not—"

"I would by no means advise you to marry a woman you are in love with."

"Uncle! That's new! I never heard that before!"

"There are plenty of things you have never heard yet."

"I always thought marriage without love was wrong."

"Marriage is one thing, and love is another," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"So one should marry for money?"

"Not for money, but taking money into consideration among other things. Man is so made that he needs the company of woman. One begins by thinking about getting married, and then proceeds to look about and select the right woman."

"Look about! Select!" said Alexander in astonishment.

"Yes, select. That is why I would not advise you to marry while you are in love. Love passes, you know—that's a commonplace."

"It is a gross lie and a scurrilous libel."

"Oh, there's no persuading you just now! You will see for yourself in time, but for the present remember my words: love, I repeat, passes, and then the woman who was once your ideal of perfection turns out, perhaps, to be far from perfect, and it will be too late to do anything then. Love conceals from you the lack of the qualities necessary in a wife. Whereas when you set out to make your own selection, you can coolly weigh the claims of this or that woman to the qualities you would like to see in your wife. That is the main consideration. And having discovered such a woman, your feelings for her will undoubtedly last, for she will answer to your requirements. Hence there will grow between you an intimacy which later develops into—"

"Love?" asked Alexander.

"Let us say, habit."

"To marry without feeling, without the poetry of love, without passion, coldly reasoning! And why?"

"And you would marry without reasoning, without asking yourself, Why? Just as you came here without asking yourself, Why?"



"So you are going to marry for money?" said Alexander.

"Taking money into consideration."

"It's the same thing."

"No. To marry for money would mean to marry for money alone. That would be base. But to marry without taking everything into consideration would be folly. And as for you, you ought not to be thinking of marrying at all yet."

"When ought I to marry, then? When I am old? Why should I follow absurd examples?"

"Including my own? Thanks."

"I don't mean you, Uncle—I mean in general. You hear of a wedding, and you go to it—and what do you see? A charming, delicate creature, hardly more than a child, only requiring the magic touch of love to unfold and become a luxurious blossom, who has been torn abruptly from her dolls, her nurse, her childish pastimes, from balls—and thank God if that is all, for often no one troubles to look into her heart, which, it may be, already belongs to another. She is attired in gauze and tulle and decked out with flowers and, despite her tears and pallor, dragged to the altar, and set beside—whom? Beside an elderly man, most likely hideous, who has lost the freshness of youth. Either he casts glances of insulting desire at her, or inspects her coldly from top to toe, as if thinking: 'You're very pretty, but I suppose you're full of whims and fancies—love and roses—I'll soon put a stop to all that nonsense. None of your sighing and dreaming, behave yourself, now!' Or, worst of all, he dreams of her fortune. The very youngest of these is at least thirty. He often has a bald spot, and it is true, can boast a cross, or even, perhaps, a star. And they say to her: 'This is he for whom all the treasures of your youth, the first stirrings of your heart, your

love, your glances, your words, your virginal caresses, your whole life are destined.' And all around crowd those who, by their youth and beauty, are a match for her, one of whom should be standing beside the bride. They devour the poor victim with their eyes, as if telling themselves: 'When we have lost our freshness, our health, when we have gone bald, we too will marry and a charming blossom like this will fall to our lot.' It's terrible!"

"Alexander, Alexander, it won't do!" exclaimed Pyotr Ivanich. "You've been writing for two years about soil, potatoes and other important things, demanding an austere, concise style, and you still rant. For God's sake don't yield to ecstasy, or if you are overcome by its fumes at least hold your tongue till they pass away, for you will never say or do anything sensible—nothing but absurdity in that state."

"But, Uncle, is not the poet's thought born of ecstasy?"

"I don't know where it's born. I only know it comes ready-made from the head, that is to say, after having been through the process of cerebration, and is only then any good." Pyotr Ivanich paused, and then went on: "And to whom, in your opinion, should these exquisite creatures be given in marriage?"

"To those they love, to those who have not yet lost the brilliance of youthful beauty, in whose head and heart may be seen the tokens of life, in whose eyes the brightness has not yet been extinguished, on whose cheeks the roses have not yet faded, whose freshness—the sign of health—has not vanished. To those who are able, with a hand still vigorous, to lead their beloved along the path of life, to bestow upon her a heart full of love, capable of understanding and sharing her feelings, when the laws of nature—"

"Enough. That is to say to such fine fellows as yourself. If we lived amidst fields and forests, that would be very well. But try marrying off some fine fellow like yourself—and see what a lot of good would come of it! The first year he will be mad with bliss, and then he will begin hanging about the wings of the theatre, or, since those laws of nature of which you speak demand change, novelty, making his wife's maid her rival—very nice, isn't it? And the wife, seeing what her husband is up to, will suddenly develop a passion for helmets, parades and masquerades, and will make him a— And when there's no fortune, it's still worse. 'Nothing to eat,' says he."

Pyotr Ivanich pulled a sour face.

"Hark to him now!" he continued. "I'm a married man, I have three children—help me, I have nothing to eat, I'm poor.... Poor! How utterly loathsome! But I trust you will fall neither into the one nor the other category."

"I shall fall into the category of happy husbands, Uncle, and Nadya into that of happy wives. I have no desire to marry the way most people do. 'My youth has gone,' is the burden of their song. 'I'm tired of living alone, it's time to get married.' I'm not that sort."

"You're talking nonsense my dear boy."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you're just like the rest of mankind, and them I know well. Come on then, tell me why you want to get married."

"Why? Nadenka—my wife!" exclaimed Alexander, covering his face with his hands.

"Well? You see you don't know yourself."

"Oh! The very thought sends cold thrills down my back. You don't know how I love her, Uncle! I love as

no one has ever loved before—with all the force of my soul—I am all hers!”

“I would rather you swore, Alexander, or, if there’s no help for it, embraced me, than kept on repeating that idiotic phrase. I wonder you can bring yourself to say the words—‘as no one has ever loved before!’” Pyotr Ivanich shrugged his shoulders.

“Why—don’t you believe it’s possible?”

“After all, taking this love of yours into consideration I really begin to think it is—for nothing could be more idiotic.”

“But she says we must wait a year, that we are too young, we must test our feelings ... a whole year ... and then—”

“A year! Why didn’t you say so at once?” Pyotr Ivanich interrupted. “Was it she who suggested it? What a clever girl she must be! How old is she?”

“Eighteen.”

“And you’re twenty-three! Well, old chap, she’s a thousand times cleverer than you. She knows what’s what, I can see that. She’ll play about with you, flirt with you, have a good time, and then ... why, some of these lasses are really very clever. You won’t get married. I thought you were in a terrific hurry to bring it off, and in secret. At your age these follies are committed so quickly that one has no time to interfere. But a whole year! She’ll make a fool of you long before that.”

“Nadya make a fool of me! Nadya an ordinary lass! Nadenka! For shame, Uncle! Whom have you been living with all your life, whom have you had dealings with, whom have you loved, if you can harbour such dark thoughts?”

“I have lived among human beings, and loved a woman.”

"She deceive me! That angel, that embodiment of sincerity, a woman such as God never created before—all purity and brilliancel"

"But for all that a woman—and she will probably deceive you."

"You'll be saying that I will deceive her, too, next."

"With time you will—you, too."

"I! Think what you like of those you do not know—but me! Aren't you ashamed of thinking so basely of me? What do you take me for?"

"For a human being."

"All people are not the same. Know then that I have given her my solemn promise to love her all my life. I am ready to confirm it with a vow."

"I know, I know! A decent man never doubts the sincerity of his vow to a woman, but later he changes, cools off—how it happens, he does not know himself. It is not done intentionally, there is nothing base there, nothing blameworthy—but nature does not allow us to love for ever. •The believers in eternal, unchangeable love behave just the same as those who do not believe, but they either do not see this, or do not wish to admit it. We, forsooth, are above all that, we are not men, but angels—stuff and nonsense!"

"But, surely, there are lovers—spouses—who love each other eternally, and live together their whole life?"

"Eternally! The man whose love lasts a fortnight is dubbed a butterfly, but two or three years—that's eternity for you! Think how love comes into being and you will see for yourself that it cannot be eternal. The vivacity, ardour and feverishness of this emotion prevent it from being long-lived. 'Lovers, spouses, live their whole lives together,' to be sure. But do they really love one another all their lives? Are we to suppose that

their first feelings of love bind them for ever? That they seek each other continually, that they gaze at one another, never wearying of it? What happens to all those little services, the continual solicitude, the craving to be together, the tears, the ecstasies, all that nonsense? The coldness and apathy of husbands have become a by-word. 'Their love has turned to friendship,' people say pompously. So it isn't love any more—it's friendship. What sort of friendship is this? Husbands and wives are bound by common interests, circumstances, the identity of their lot—and so they go on living together. But for all this they do part, love someone else—some sooner, some later—and this is called unfaithfulness. Since, however, they are living together they go on from habit, which, I would whisper in your ear, is a great deal stronger than love. Not for nothing has it been called second nature. Otherwise people would never cease, for their whole life, to suffer when parted, or when the beloved object dies—but you see they do console themselves. The very ones who chanted over and over again—eternal love, eternal love! They don't try and reason, all they do is shout."

"And aren't you afraid for yourself, Uncle? According to this, your *fiancée* will—forgive me—"

"I don't think so."

"What complacency!"

"Not complacency—just sane calculations!"

"Calculations again!"

"Well, reasoning if you prefer it."

"Supposing she were to fall in love with somebody else!"

"We mustn't let it come to that. But if such a misfortune were to occur, there are ways of moderating it."

"Are there really? Is it in your power—"

"Definitely."



"Then all betrayed husbands would do so," said Alexander. "If there were a way."

"Not all husbands are alike, my dear boy. Some are perfectly indifferent to their wives, pay no attention to what is going on round them, and do not wish to see anything. Others, for the sake of their pride, would like to do the same but are no good at it. They don't know how to manage matters."

"What would you do?"

"That's my secret. It's no good talking to you. You're in a fever."

"I'm happy, and I thank God! And what is in store for me I have no desire to know."

"The first half of your sentence is so wise that a man not in love could have said it. It shows the ability to enjoy the present moment. But the second—excuse me—is no good at all. 'I have no desire to know what is in store for me,' in other words, 'I do not wish to realize that there was a yesterday and there is a today. I do not wish to think, to consider, I will not prepare for this exigency, nor avert that one, I will yield to chance.' I ask you—what's the good of that?"

"And what is your way, Uncle? Do you think that when the moment of bliss comes one should take a magnifying glass and examine it?"

"No, a minimizing glass, so as not to go suddenly off your head with joy, and rush into everyone's embraces."

"Or, say, there is a moment of sadness," continued Alexander. "Must it also be looked at through your minimizing glass?"

"No, a magnifying glass should be used for sorrow. It is easier to bear when you imagine it twice as great as it really is."

"But why," continued Alexander, in vexation, "should



I nip each joy in the bud by frigid reasoning, instead of yielding to it? Why should I think—she will deceive me, it will pass? Why should I torture myself in advance, before anything has happened?”

“Ah, but when it does happen,” interrupted his uncle, “you will be able to say to yourself—sorrow too will pass, just as it has passed many times before for me, and for others, too. I don’t think there is any harm in that, and it is worth thinking about. Then you will not torture yourself when you see the fickleness of life’s chances. You will be calm and tranquil, in so far as man can be.”

“So that’s the secret of your calmness!” mused Alexander.

Pyotr Ivanich went on writing in silence.

“But what a life!” Alexander burst out again. “Never to yield to the moment’s bliss, always to be thinking, thinking.... No, I feel this is not right. I want to live without your cold analysis, not wondering whether misfortune or peril lie in wait for me. What does it matter? Why should I think about it beforehand and poison my happiness?”

“I’ve just told you why—but you keep harping on the same string. Do not compel me to make invidious comparisons. This is why: because, when you have foreseen a danger or an obstacle or a disaster, it will be easier to cope with it or to bear it when it comes. You will not go mad or die. And when happiness comes you will not leap about and break marble busts—is that clear? You tell him: this is the beginning—try to imagine from it what the end will be; but he shuts his eyes, averts his eyes, as if he had seen a bogey and goes on living like a child. According to you one should live from day to day, taking things as they come, sitting at the door of one’s

cabin and measuring life by dinners, balls, love and constancy. Everybody is looking for the golden age. Didn't I tell you that, while your ideas were very well for country life, with your woman and half a dozen children, there is work to be done here, in this town. And it requires that you shall always be thinking, always remembering what you did yesterday, what you are doing today, in order to know what must be done tomorrow, in other words, you must be constantly testing yourself and your occupations. In that way something real will be achieved. But your way—Oh, what's the good of talking to you now? You're delirious. Oh, oh! It's nearly one. Not another word, Alexander. Go away, I won't listen to you! Come to dinner with me tomorrow—there'll be some people."

"Friends of yours?"

"Yes—Konev, Smirnov, Fyodorov—you know them. And a few others."

"Konev, Smirnov, Fyodorov. They're all people with whom you have business."

"Oh, yes—they're all very useful fellows."

"And are these the people you call your friends? Come to think of it I can't remember ever seeing you greet anyone with particular enthusiasm."

"I've told you over and over again that I call those my friends whom I meet the oftenest, and who contribute either to my advantage or to my enjoyment. For heaven's sake—why feed people for nothing?"

"And I thought you were giving a farewell dinner before your wedding to your true friends, those you really love, with whom you would recall for the last time over a goblet of wine your joyous youth, and, perhaps, on parting, would press warmly to your bosom."

"In those words of yours there is everything that does not and should not exist in real life. With what en-

thusiasm your aunt would have thrown her arms round you! True friends, when you might say simply—friends. A goblet, when people really drink out of wine-glasses, and embrace on parting, when there is no question of parting. Ugh, Alexander!”

“And do you not regret parting with your friends, or at least the prospect of seeing them less frequently?” asked Alexander.

“Not a bit. I have never been so intimate with anyone as to have regrets, and I advise you to follow my example.”

“But perhaps they’re not like you. Perhaps they are sorry to lose in you a dear friend, a companion.”

“That’s their business, not mine. I have lost many friends in this way, and you see I have not died of it. So you’ll come tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow, Uncle, I’m —”

“What?”

“Invited to the country.”

“To the Lyubetskys’, I suppose.”

“Yes.”

“I see. Well, just as you like. Think of your work, Alexander. I shall tell the editor what you are up to.”

“Oh, Uncle, now really! I swear I’ll finish the extracts from the German economists—”

“Begin them first. Remember, now—don’t come asking for ‘filthy lucre’ when you are swamped in ‘rosy dreams.’”

#### IV

Alexander’s life was divided into two sections. The mornings were devoted to his work. He rummaged among dusty files, gathered a multitude of facts which had nothing to do with himself, calculated on paper millions of money not belonging to him. But sometimes his brain

refused to think for others, his pen slipped out of his fingers, and he was overcome by those "rosy dreams" which vexed Pyotr Ivanich so much.

At such moments Alexander would throw himself back in his chair and mentally soar to blissful regions, where there were neither paper nor ink, strange faces nor official uniforms, where peace, sweetness and coolness prevailed, where flowers shed their fragrance in an elegantly furnished hall from which stole the sounds of a piano, where a parrot hopped about in its cage, while in the garden outside, the branches of birch-trees and lilac bushes swayed in the gentle breeze. And the queen of all this was she....

In the mornings, though seated in his office, Alexander was present in the spirit on the island where the Lyubetskys' villa was situated, and in the evening he was there in the flesh, in his whole being. Let us cast an indiscreet glance at his bliss.

It was a hot day, one of those days which occur so seldom in Petersburg. The sun shone beneficently on the fields, but scorched the Petersburg streets, its rays baking the pavement and, reflected back from the paving stones, baking the pedestrians too. Men and women walked slowly, letting their heads droop, and dogs ran about with their tongues hanging out of their mouths. The town was like one of those fabulous cities in which, at the wave of a magician's wand, everything has turned to stone. No carriages rattled over the paving stones. Awnings hung over windows like lowered eyelids. The road gleamed like a parquet floor. The pavements burned the soles of people's feet. All was drowsy tedium.

The pedestrian, wiping the sweat from his face, sought the shade. A mail-coach slowly conveyed six passengers out of town, scarcely stirring the dust beneath its wheels.

At four o'clock the clerks emerged from their offices and sauntered slowly to their homes.

Alexander, dashing out as if the roof had fallen in, looked at his watch. Too late to get there in time for dinner! He dashed into a restaurant.

"What can I have? Quick!"

"Soup *Julienne* and *à la reine*, sauce *à la provençale*, *à la maître d'hôtel*, roast turkey, game, meringues."

"Give me soup *à la provençale*, *Julienne* sauce, roast meringues, and be quick about it!"

The waiter stared at him.

"What's the matter?" asked Alexander impatiently.

The waiter disappeared and brought the first thing that came into his head. Alexander was perfectly satisfied. Without waiting for the last course he ran out on to the embankment. A boat and two oarsmen were waiting for him.

An hour later, coming in sight of the promised land, he rose in the boat and strained his eyes into the distance. At first they were dimmed by fear and anxiety, gradually changing to doubt. But suddenly his features were irradiated by a joyful light, like a ray of sunshine. He had made out at the gate a familiar dress—and now he was recognized, a handkerchief was waved. He was expected, perhaps had been for a long time. The very soles of his feet tingled with impatience.

"Oh, if it were possible to walk on the water!" thought Alexander. "All sorts of idiotic inventions are made, why does no one invent a way of doing that?"

The boatmen wielded the oars slowly, with the regularity of machinery. Sweat poured in copious streams down their sunburnt faces. What did they care if Alexander's heart throbbed violently in his bosom, if, his eyes fixed on a single point, he twice put first one, then the

other foot over the side of the boat? It was all the same to them, they rowed on as stolidly as ever, wiping their heated faces occasionally on their sleeves.

"Quicker!" he cried. "Fifty kopeks for vodka!"

Then how they bent over the oars and bobbed up and down in their seats! Exhaustion was quite forgotten. Where did they get their strength from? The oars danced over the water. Every time the boat glided forward about a yard would be left behind, ten strokes of the oars, and the prow, describing a semi-circle over the water, approached the shore with a graceful movement and came to rest against the bank. Alexander and Nadya smiled at each other from afar, never taking their eyes off each other's faces. Alexander plunged one foot in the water and stepped ashore. Nadya laughed.

"Careful, Master! Wait till I give you a hand," said one of the boatmen, when Alexander was already on dry land.

"Wait for me here," he told them and ran up to Nadya.

She was smiling at him tenderly from the distance. With every stroke of the oars, as the boat drew nearer, her heart throbbed violently.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna!" he said, scarcely able to breathe for joy.

"Alexander Fyodorich!" she said in reply.

They rushed together instinctively, but stopped suddenly and stood looking at each other with a smile, their eyes moist, unable to utter a word. Several minutes passed thus.

Pyotr Ivanich can hardly be blamed for not having noticed Nadya at once. She was not a beauty, and did not attract attention at first glance.

But once you examined her features more closely you did not look away. Her face was seldom in repose for two minutes together. The thoughts and varying emotions



passing through her excessively impressionable mind pursued one another continually, merging in a marvellous play of all the features and giving her a new and unexpected expression every minute. The eyes would suddenly flash like lightning, now darting a burning glance, now hiding beneath the long lashes. Next her face would seem lifeless and still, like the face of a marble statue. After this you expected another penetrating ray, but nothing of the sort! The lids would be slowly raised, and you would be bathed in a mild radiance, as if the moon were slowly emerging from behind a cloud. Your heart would not fail to respond to this glance with a gentle throb. The same was true of her movements. There was much grace in them, but it was not the grace of a sylph. There was that wildness and abruptness in it that nature bestows on all, till they are toned down by art, and the last vestiges removed. These vestiges still showed themselves in Nadya's movements. She might be sitting in a picturesque pose, when suddenly, moved by God knows what inner stirrings, this picturesque pose would be broken up by some completely unexpected movement and a gesture equally entrancing. Her conversation would take similar unexpected turns—some veracious observation would be followed by a mood of dreaminess, then came a harsh judgement, a childish trick, subtle, cunning. Everything she did or said betrayed an ardent mind, wilful, restless feelings. And Alexander was not the only one who was smitten by her charms. Pyotr Ivanich alone escaped—and there are not many like him.

"You were waiting for me? Oh, Lord, how happy I am!" said Alexander.

"Waiting for you? Me? Nothing of the sort," replied Nadya, with a toss of her head. "I'm always in the garden, you know that."



"Are you angry with me?" he asked timidly.

"Whatever for? What an idea!"

"Then give me your hand."

She gave him her hand, but snatched it away the minute he touched it—and then a sudden change came over her. Her smile disappeared, something like vexation showed in her face.

"Are you drinking milk?" asked he.

Nadya had a cup and a rusk in her hands.

"I'm having dinner," replied she.

"Dinner, at six o'clock, and with milk?"

"You, of course, couldn't look at milk after one of your uncle's grand dinners. But we live in the country—our ways are humbler."

She bit off a few crumbs from the rusk with her front teeth and sipped the milk, with a charming grimace.

"I did not dine with my uncle, I refused his invitation yesterday," said Alexander.

"How can you tell such fibs? Where have you been all this time?"

"I was at the office till four—"

"And now it's six. Don't tell me, admit you were tempted by the dinner and the pleasant company. I suppose you had a wonderful time!"

"Upon my word I did not go to my uncle's!" said Alexander in eager expostulation. "How could I have got to you so early if I had?"

"Oh, it seems early to you? You would just as soon have come two hours later," said Nadya, turning from him with a swift pirouette and walking up the path to the house. Alexander followed her.

"Don't come near me!" she said, waving him back. "I can't bear the sight of you."

"Stop this affectation, Nadezhda Alexandrovna!"

"It isn't affectation at all. Tell me where you've been all this time!"

"I left the office at four," began Alexander, "and it took me an hour to get here."

"In that case you would have been here by five, and it's six now. What did you do for a whole hour? See what stories you tell!"

"I had a quick meal at a restaurant."

"A quick meal! Only an hour!" she said. "Poor dear! You must be famished! Won't you have some milk?"

"Oh, give me that cup!" said Alexander, stretching out his hand.

But she suddenly came to a standstill, turned the cup upside down, and, paying not the slightest attention to Alexander, watched with interest the last drops from the cup running into the sand.

"You are pitiless," he said. "How can you torture me so?"

"Do look, Alexander Fyodorich!" Nadya interrupted him, absorbed in her occupation. "Will I be able to pour a drop on that little beetle crawling along the path? Oh, I did! Poor little thing! It will die!" And she picked the beetle up solicitously, placing it on the palm of her hand and breathing on it.

"You take a great interest in that beetle," he said in a tone of vexation.

"Poor little thing! Look at it, it will die," said Nadya mournfully. "What have I done?"

She carried the beetle in the palm of her hand for some time, but when it stirred and began to crawl backwards and forwards on her hand, Nadya started, flung it on the ground and trampled on it, saying, "Nasty thing!"

"Well, where have you been?" she asked again.

"I told you—"

"Oh, yes! At your uncle's! Were there many people? Was there champagne? You smell of champagne even at a distance."

"But I wasn't at my uncle's!" Alexander interrupted in despair. "Who told you I was?"

"You told me yourself."

"Why, I suppose they're only just sitting down to table. You don't know those dinners—as if they could be over in an hour!"

"You had two hours for dinner, from four to six."

"And what time did I have for the journey, then?"

She made no reply, but reached for a branch of acacia, and then ran on along the path.

Alexander followed her.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Where d'you suppose? To Mamma, of course."

"But why? Perhaps we'll be in her way."

"Oh no we won't!"

Marya Mikhailovna, Nadya's mother, was one of those good-natured, simple mammas who admire everything their children do. Marya Mikhailovna would, let us say, order the carriage.

"Where are you going, *Maman*?" asks Nadya.

"Just for a drive—it's such lovely weather," says her Mamma.

"Oh, but Alexander Fyodorich said he would come."

And the carriage is sent away.

Another time Marya Mikhailovna sits sighing and taking snuff as the needles click over the endless muffler she is knitting, or she may be deep in some French novel.

"*Maman*, why aren't you dressing?" asks Nadya sternly.

"What for?"

"We're going out, aren't we?"

"Going out?"

"Yes. Alexander Fyodorich is coming for us. Surely you haven't forgotten!"

"I know nothing about it."

"What d'you mean?" exclaims Nadya, displeased.

Then the mother would put away her knitting and her book and go and dress. Nadya enjoyed complete freedom, disposing of herself and her mamma and her time and occupations at her own sweet will. And yet she was an affectionate, even a tender daughter, though she could not be called obedient, for it was not she who obeyed her mother, but her mother who obeyed her.

"Go to *Maman*," said Nadya when they got to the door of the ball-room.

"And you?"

"I'll come afterwards."

"Then I will, too."

"No, you go first."

Alexander went in, but immediately came back on tip-toe.

"She's dozing in her chair," he whispered.

"Never mind, we'll go in. *Maman, Maman!*"

"Eh?"

"Alexander Fyodorich has come."

"Eh?"

"Monsieur Aduyev has come to see you."

"Eh?"

"See how soundly she sleeps! Don't wake her!" pleaded Alexander.

"But I will! *Maman!*"

"Eh?"

"Wake up, now! Alexander Fyodorich is here."

"Where's Alexander Fyodorich?" said Marya Mikhailovna, looking straight at him and adjusting her cap, which had slipped to one side. "Oh! It's you, Alexander

Fyodorich! Welcome! I was sitting here and fell asleep. I don't know why, it means we're going to have bad weather. And my corn's shooting, that means rain. I dozed, and dreamed that Ignaty was announcing visitors, but I couldn't make out who they were. And then Nadya called out, and I woke up at once. I'm a light sleeper—the tiniest creaking and I open my eyes. Sit down, Alexander Fyodorich, how are you?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"And how is Pyotr Ivanich?"

"He's quite well, too, thank you."

"Why doesn't he ever come to see us? I was thinking only yesterday—he might just drop in. But no—he's very busy, I suppose."

"Very," said Alexander.

"And we haven't seen *you* for several days, either," continued Marya Mikhailovna. "As soon as I woke up today I asked, 'What's Nadya doing?' 'She's still asleep,' they told me. Well, let her sleep, I said. She's out all day in the garden, the weather's fine, she gets tired. At her age one sleeps soundly, at my age it's different—you wouldn't believe how I suffer from insomnia! It quite depresses me—nerves or something, goodness knows what! They brought me my coffee—I always have coffee in bed, and while I was drinking I thought to myself, 'How is it we see nothing of Alexander Fyodorich? I hope he isn't ill.' Then I got up—and if it wasn't eleven o'clock already! Fancy! The servants never tell me! I went to Nadya's room, and she was still asleep. I woke her. 'Time to get up, dearie—nearly twelve o'clock, what's the matter with you?' I'm after her all day, like a nurse. I sent away the governess on purpose, so as not to have strangers around. Trust a stranger, and God knows what might happen! No! I brought her up myself,

I'm very strict with her, I never let her leave my side, and I must own that Nadya is a good girl—she never keeps a single thought from me. I know her through and through. Then the chef came and I spent an hour talking to him. Then I read *Mémoires du Diable*—I love that Soulier. He writes so beautifully. Then neighbour Marya Ivanovna called with her husband and the morning passed before I knew where I was, and suddenly I noticed it was four o'clock—time for dinner. Oh, yes—why didn't you come to dinner? We waited for you till five."

"Till five?" repeated Alexander. "I simply couldn't, Marya Mikhailovna—I was kept at the office. Never wait for me if I'm not here by four, I beg you."

"That's what I said, but Nadya kept saying, 'Just a little longer!'"

"Me? *Maman*, how can you! Didn't I say, 'Let's have dinner, Mamma,' and you kept saying, 'No, we'll wait, Alexander Fyodorich hasn't been here for a long time, he's sure to come to dinner.'"

"Listen to her, listen to her!" said Marya Mikhailovna, shaking her head. "What a shameless little baggage! Putting her own words into my mouth!"

Nadya turned away to the flowers and began teasing the parrot.

"I said, 'Well, Alexander Fyodorich won't come now,'" continued Marya Mikhailovna. "'It's half past four.' But she kept on, 'No, *Maman*, we must wait, he's sure to come.' At a quarter to five, I said, 'Say what you will, Nadya, Alexander Fyodorich must have gone out to dinner somewhere, and he isn't coming, and I'm hungry.' But no—'Wait a little, wait till five.' And she fairly starved me. What, Miss, can you deny it?"

"Polly, Polly!" came from among the flowers. "Where did you have dinner today—at Nunky's?"

"What's that? Hiding?" went on the mother. "I suppose you're ashamed to show yourself in the daylight."

"Not a bit," retorted Nadya, emerging from among the flowers and seating herself at the window.

"And she wouldn't even sit down to table," said Marya Mikhailovna. "Asked for a cup of milk and went out into the garden. And she never had a bite of dinner. What? Look me in the eyes, Miss!"

Alexander heard this narrative in astonishment. He glanced towards Nadya, but she turned her back on him and began nipping off ivy leaves.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna," he said. "Am I really so fortunate? Did you really think of me?"

"Don't come near me!" she cried out, vexed to find her cunning exposed. "Mamma's only joking, and you believe her."

"And where are the strawberries you put away for Alexander Fyodorich?" questioned her mother.

"Strawberries?"

"Yes, strawberries."

"You ate them at dinner," said Nadya.

"Me? Aren't you ashamed of yourself—you put them away and didn't give me any. 'Alexander Fyodorich is coming,' you said. 'I'll give you some when he comes.' What d'you say to that?"

Alexander directed a glance of arch tenderness at Nadya. She blushed.

"She took off the stalks herself, Alexander Fyodorich," added her mother.

"Why do you tell such stories, *Maman*? I took the stalks off two or three and ate them myself, Vasilisa did the others."

"Don't you believe her, Alexander Fyodorich—Vasilisa was sent to the town early in the morning. Why pre-



tend? I'm sure Alexander Fyodorich would rather you had done them than Vasilisa!"

Nadya smiled, then disappeared once more among the flowers, and came back with a plateful of strawberries. She held it out to Alexander. He kissed her hand and received the plate as if it were a marshal's baton.

"You don't deserve any. Keeping us waiting so long," said Nadya. "I was two hours at the gate, and fancy—I could see someone coming and thought it was you and waved my handkerchief, and it was a stranger, some officer. And he had the cheek to wave back."

Visitors came and went during the evening. Dusk fell. Again the three of them—the mother, and daughter and Alexander—were alone. And then this trio, too, was gradually broken up. Nadya went out into the garden. Marya Mikhailovna and Alexander were left to perform their halting duet. For a long time she chanted to him of her doings of yesterday and today, and of what she would do tomorrow. He began to suffer agonies of boredom and anxiety. Night was coming on apace and he had not yet been able to say a word to Nadya in private. He was rescued by the chef when that benefactor entered the room to ask what they would have for supper, while Alexander tried to control his impatience, which was still greater than it had been in the boat. During the discussion of rissoles and sour milk Alexander planned a skilful retreat. He employed all manner of manoeuvres to get away from Marya Mikhailovna's chair. First he went to the window and looked out, his feet almost carrying him to the open door. Then slowly, scarcely able to refrain from rushing away, he moved towards the piano, struck the keys here and there, picked up some music from the stand with feverish fingers, looked into it and put it back. He actually had the self-control to sniff

at a flower or two and wake the parrot. Then his impatience came to a head. There was the open door beside him, but it would not have been quite the thing to escape through it—he must stand for a minute or two and go out as if casually. But the chef had already retreated two steps, one last word and he would be gone, and then Madame Lyubetskaya would certainly start talking to him again. Alexander could bear it no longer, he slipped through the doorway as sinuously as a snake, leapt off the porch from the top step and was at the end of the garden path in a couple of bounds—on the bank, next to Nadya.

“So you remembered me at last,” she said, in good-humoured rebuke.

“If you knew what I’ve been going through!” replied Alexander. “And you gave me not the slightest help!”

Nadya showed him the book in her hand.

“This is what I would have called you with in another minute, if you hadn’t come,” she said. “Sit down, Mamma won’t come now. She’s afraid of the damp. I’ve got *such* a lot of things to tell you—oh!”

“And so have I—oh!”

And then they told each other nothing, or practically nothing—just a few things they had already said a score of times before. The usual dreams, the sky, the stars, their mutual sympathy, their happiness. The conversation was mostly carried on in the language of glances, smiles and ejaculations. The book lay on the grass. Night tell—but is there really such a thing as night in Petersburg in the summer? It is no night, some other name must be found—something like twilight. All around was still. The Neva seemed to be slumbering; every now and then, as if in its sleep, a wavelet lapped gently against the shore,

and again all was hushed. A belated breeze springing up somewhere ruffled the drowsy waters, but could not wake them, merely rippling their surface and fanning Nadya and Alexander with its cool breath, or bringing them from afar the sound of singing—and again all was silent, the Neva as motionless as a sleeper whom a slight noise has caused to open his eyes for a moment, only to close them again immediately, his heavy eyelids still more firmly sealed. Then the sound of distant thunder seemed to come from beyond the bridge, followed by the barking of a dog left to guard the stake-nets a little way away, and again all was quiet. The trees formed a dark vaulted roof, their branches swaying noiselessly. Lights twinkled in the summer cottages along the banks.

What enchantment is borne on the warm air at such times? What is the secret which haunts flowers, trees and grass, and fills the soul with unexplicable tenderness? Why is it that thoughts and feelings quite different from those born amidst noise and society come to us? And what an atmosphere for love is created by this sleep of nature, this twilight, these silent trees, fragrant blossoms, this solitude! How irresistibly the mind is attuned to dreams, the heart to those rare sensations which appear, in the light of everyday, regular, austere life, such useless, inappropriate, absurd futilities. Useless, they may be, and yet it is only in such moments that the soul glimpses vague possibilities of that happiness so eagerly sought at other times, and not found.

Alexander and Nadya went closer to the river and leaned over the garden railings. Nadya gazed long and thoughtfully at the Neva, into the distance, and Alexander gazed at Nadya. Their souls were brimful of joy, their hearts felt a pang at once sweet and painful, but their tongues were still.

And then Alexander touched her waist gently. As gently she pushed his hand away with her elbow. He tried again, and this time she pushed his hand away still more gently, never taking her eyes off the river. At his third venture she did not push his hand away at all.

He took her hand—she did not withdraw it. He pressed the hand and it answered to his pressure. They stood in silence—but with what feelings!

“Nadya,” he said softly.

She said nothing.

Alexander bent over her with a beating heart. She could feel his hot breath on her cheek, she started, she turned away, and—did not retreat in noble indignation, did not cry out. She was no longer able to pretend, to retreat. The magic of love silenced the voice of reason, and when Alexander pressed his lips to hers, she responded to his kiss, almost imperceptibly, it is true, but she did respond.

“Most improper!” severe mammas will exclaim. “Alone in the garden, without her mother, exchanging kisses with a young man!” Well—it can’t be helped! It may have been improper, but she did respond to his kiss.

“That a man can be so happy!” said Alexander to himself, bending to her lips again, this time leaving his lips on hers for several seconds.

She stood there pale, motionless, tears glistening on her eyelashes, her breast heaving violently.

“It’s a dream!” whispered Alexander.

Nadya suddenly started—the moment of oblivion had passed.

“You forget yourself!” she exclaimed and stepped hastily away from him. “I’ll tell Mamma!”

Alexander fell from the clouds.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna! Do not spoil my bliss by reproaches! Do not be like—"

She looked at him, burst out into loud, hilarious laughter, and came back standing beside the railings, her head and her hand resting confidently on his shoulder.

"And do you love me so much?" she asked, wiping away a tear which was rolling down her cheek.

Alexander moved his shoulders imperceptibly in a gesture of inexpressible eloquence. Pyotr Ivanich would have called the expression of his face idiotic, and perhaps it was, but how much bliss there was in this idiotic expression!

They gazed at the water, the sky, the distance again, as if nothing had happened. But they were afraid to look at each other, and when their glances did at last meet, they smiled and immediately turned away again.

"Can there really be sorrow in the world?" said Nadya after a pause.

"They say there is," replied Alexander musingly. "But I can't believe it."

"What sorrow can there be?"

"My uncle would say—poverty."

"Poverty! But don't the poor feel just what we now feel? Then they're not poor any more. So you see!"

"My uncle says they have no time for that sort of thing—they have to eat and drink."

"Ugh! Eat! It's not true what your uncle says—one can be happy without that. I haven't had dinner today, and look how happy I am."

He laughed.

"Why, for such a moment I would give all I have to the poor—all!" continued Nadya. "Let the poor come! Oh, why can't I give everyone some happiness to console and rejoice them?"

"Angel! Angel!" uttered Alexander ecstatically, pressing her hand.

"You're hurting me!" cried Nadya, wrinkling her forehead, and pulling away her hand.

But he seized the hand again and began pressing fiery kisses on it.

"How I will thank God," she went on, "today, tomorrow, my whole life—for such an evening! How happy I am! And you?"

And then she was plunged in sudden thought. A look of anxiety came into her eyes.

"Listen!" she said. "They say nothing ever repeats itself. Does it mean that this moment will never repeat itself either?"

"No, no!" replied Alexander. "It's not true! It will repeat itself! There will be still better moments! Yes, I feel there will be...."

She shook her head incredulously. And his uncle's lessons came into his head, so that he broke off suddenly.

"No," he told himself. "No, it cannot be! My uncle never knew such happiness, that's why he's so stern and mistrustful of others. Poor thing! I pity his cold, hard heart! It has never known the intoxication of love, that's the reason of his jaundiced view of life. May the Lord forgive him! If he could see my bliss, not even he would dare to touch it, or to insult it with impure doubts. I pity him."

"No, no, Nadya, we will be happy," he continued, aloud. "Look round you! Isn't everything here happy at the sight of our love? God himself will bless it. How joyfully we shall go through life hand in hand. How *proud, how great we shall be in our mutual love!*"

"Oh, don't keep looking ahead," she interrupted him. "Don't prophesy! Somehow it frightens me when you talk like that. I'm sad even now."

"What is there to be afraid of? Surely we have the right to believe in ourselves?"

"No, no!" she said, shaking her head.

He looked at her and grew thoughtful.

"Why not?" he said, and went on immediately: "After all, what could destroy this world of happiness of ours? What is it to anyone what we do? We will always be alone, we will keep others at a distance—what have we to do with them? And what have they to do with us? Nobody will think about us, we shall be forgotten, and then we shall not be disturbed by rumours of sorrow and misfortune, just as, here in this garden, no sound disturbs the solemn silence—"

"Nadya! Alexander Fyodorich!" came suddenly from the porch. "Where are you?"

"D'you hear?" said Nadya in prophetic tones. "It is a hint from fate—this moment will never be repeated. I feel it."

She seized his hand, pressing it, and, casting a glance at him that was strange and sad, suddenly plunged into the gloom of the alley.

He was alone with his thoughts again.

"Alexander Fyodorich!" came from the porch again. "The sour milk's been on the table ever so long."

He shrugged his shoulders and went into the house.

"After a moment of ineffable bliss—all of a sudden sour milk!" he said to Nadya. "Can the whole of life really be like this?"

"So long as it's no worse!" she replied cheerfully. "And the milk's delicious, especially when one hasn't had dinner."

She was elated by her happiness. Her cheeks burned, her eyes blazed with an unusual brilliance. What a solicitous hostess she was, how gaily she chattered! Not a



trace of the momentary sadness remained. It was all swallowed up in joy.

The dawn had already covered half of the sky when Alexander took his seat in the boat. The boatmen, in expectation of the promised reward, spat on the palms of their hands and began bobbing up and down in their seats as before, working the oars with all their might.

"Not so fast," said Alexander. "Another fifty kopeks for vodka!"

They looked at him and then at one another. One scratched his chest, the other his back, and they began moving the oars almost imperceptibly, scarcely touching the water. The boat floated like a swan.

"And my uncle would like to persuade me that happiness is a mirage, that nothing is to be utterly believed in, that life—He ought to be ashamed of himself! It's too bad! Why should he want to deceive me so cruelly? No—this is life, just as I had imagined it, as it should be, as it is and as it will be. Otherwise there is no life."

A fresh morning breeze was blowing gently from the north. Alexander started slightly, both from the breeze and from his memories, then he yawned, and wrapping his cloak round him gave himself up to daydreams.

## V

Alexander had attained the summit of his happiness. There was nothing left for him to desire. His work, his journalistic labours, all were forgotten, abandoned. He was passed over at the office, but he scarcely noticed it, and then only because his uncle reminded him of it. Pyotr Ivanich advised him to stop wasting time over trifles, but at the word "trifles" Alexander shrugged his shoulders, smiled pityingly and said almost nothing. His

uncle, seeing that his advice was unavailing, also shrugged his shoulders, smiled pityingly and said nothing. But he could not help dropping out:

"Have it your own way, but mind you don't come asking for filthy lucre!"

"Don't worry, Uncle!" replied Alexander. "Insufficient money is a misfortune—I don't require much, and I have sufficient."

"Then I can only congratulate you," retorted Pyotr Ivanich.

Alexander obviously avoided him. He had lost all faith in his uncle's dismal forebodings but feared his cold attitude to love in general, and his insulting hints at his nephew's feelings for Nadya in particular.

He could not bear to listen to his uncle's analysis of his love, upon which he calmly brought to bear the laws that applied to everyone else, thus profaning what Alexander regarded as lofty and sacred. He concealed his ecstacy, his belief in a future of rose-coloured happiness, sensing that the roses would shed their petals and turn into soil the moment his uncle's analysis touched them. And at first his uncle avoided him, thinking that the youth would fall idle, waste his substance, and then come to him for money, be a dead-weight on him.

In the gait, the glance, the whole outward appearance of Alexander there was something solemn and mysterious. He behaved to others as a capitalist behaves on 'Change to petty speculators, with modest dignity, thinking to himself: "Poor things! Which of you has a treasure like mine? Which of you can feel as I do? Which has such fortitude of soul?" and so on and so on.

He was convinced that he was the only person in the world who loved and was loved so intensely.

And it was not only his uncle whom he avoided, but the *crowd* as he said. He either worshipped at the shrine of his divinity, or sat alone in his study, drunk with bliss, analyzed it, splitting it into infinitesimally small atoms. This he called creating *a world of his own*, and, seated there in his solitude, really did create for himself a sort of world, in which he mainly lived, going but seldom and unwillingly to his office, which he dubbed a *bitter necessity*, a *necessary evil*, or *dismal prose*. He had a variety of names for it. To his editor and his friends he did not go at all.

To converse with his *ego* was for him the highest pleasure. "Only when alone with himself," he wrote in a story he worked on now and then, "can a man see himself, as in a mirror. Only then does he learn to believe in human greatness and dignity. How splendid he is in this converse with his spiritual forces! Like a leader he passes them in severe review, draws them up according to a closely reasoned plan, and, at their head, dashes forward, acts, creates. How pitiful, on the contrary, is he who is unable, who fears to be alone with himself, who avoids his own company, and is ever seeking that of others, alien to him in mind and soul..." You might have believed him to be some thinker discovering new laws for the structure of the world or the life of humanity—but he was only a man in love.

See him in his high-backed armchair! Before him is a sheet of paper on which a few stanzas are scribbled. Now he bends over the sheet of paper to make some correction, or to add a few lines, now he throws himself back in his chair to think. On his lips flickers a smile—it is obvious that he has only just removed them from the brimming *chalice* of happiness. His eyes close luxuriously, like a cat dozing, or suddenly gleam with the fire of inner emotion.

All around is still. Nothing is to be heard but the hum of carriages far away in the busy street, and now and then Yevsei, tired of cleaning boots, thinking aloud:

"I mustn't forget—I owe a kopek for vinegar and five kopeks for cabbage. I must pay it back tomorrow, or else the shopkeeper won't give me credit another time, the beast! Weighing out his bread, as if it were a famine year—it's a disgrace! Eh, Lord, but I'm tired! I'll just finish cleaning this boot and have a nap. They're asleep long ago at Grachi, I suppose—not like here! Oh, Lord, when shall I see it again?"

Here he sighed gustily, breathed on the boot and once again began flourishing his brush. He considered this his main, if not only duty, and judged a servant or any other man by his ability to clean boots. He cleaned them himself with a kind of passion.

"Stop it, Yevsei! You prevent me from working with your nonsense!" shouted Alexander.

"Nonsense!" Yevsei growled. "Nonsense! It's you who waste time on nonsense—I do real work. Look how dirty you made your boots, it's all I can do to get them clean!"

He placed the boot on the table, gazing lovingly at the mirror-like surface of the leather.

"See if you find anyone else to clean them like that!" he said. "Nonsense indeed!"

Alexander plunged deeper and deeper into his dreams of Nadya, which gradually merged into dreams of writing poetry.

There was nothing on his desk. Everything reminiscent of his former occupations, of office work, or journalism, was piled under the desk, on cupboard shelves, or under the bed.

"The very sight of *that filth*," he said, "frightens off creative thought and it flies away like a nightingale from

a copse at the sudden creaking of ungreased cart-wheels in the road."

The dawn often found him working at some elegy. All the time not spent at the Lyubetskys' was devoted to poetry. He would write a poem and read it to Nadya. She would copy it on a pretty sheet of paper and learn it by heart, and he *knew the poet's highest bliss—to hear his works from beloved lips.*

"You are my Muse," he told her. "Be the vestal virgin of that sacred flame which burns in my breast! If you neglect it it will be eternally extinguished."

Then he sent poems under assumed names to the papers. They were published, for they were not bad, not lacking in energy here and there, and penetrated through and through with ardent feeling; and they scanned smoothly enough.

Nadya gloried in his love and called him, "My poet."

"Yes, yours, yours for ever!" he said. Glory awaited him with a smile, and it was Nadya, he thought, who would weave the wreath for him, interspersing the laurel leaves with myrtle, and then—"Life, life, how beautiful thou art!" he exclaimed. "And my uncle? Why does he try to disturb the peace of my soul? Is he not a demon sent me by fate? Why does he poison my happiness with his gall? Is it not envy, because his own heart knows not such pure joys, or is it, perhaps, a dark desire to injure ... far, far from him let me be! He will slay my loving soul, infect it with his own hatred, he will corrupt it."

And he fled from his uncle, did not see him for weeks on end, for months. And if, when they met, the conversation turned on feelings, Alexander maintained a scornful silence, or listened like one whose convictions are not to be shaken by any arguments whatever. He considered his own convictions infallible, his own opinions and feel-

ings incontrovertible, and determined henceforth to be guided by them alone, saying that he was no longer a boy, and that there was *no reason why only the opinions of others should be sacred*,\* and the like.

But his uncle always appeared the same. He never asked his nephew anything and either did not notice, or chose to ignore, his behaviour. Seeing that Alexander stuck to his arguments, that he went on living as before and did not ask for money, Pyotr Ivanich was as affectionate as ever and even reproached him playfully for coming to see him so seldom.

"My wife is angry with you," he said. "She looks upon you as a relative. We always dine at home—come!"

That was all. But Alexander did not often go, he had no time. Morning at the office, from afternoon to night-fall at the Lyubetskys'—there was only the night left, and at night he retired into his own self-created *world* and continued to produce literature. And after all, one must sleep a little, too.

He was not quite so successful with prose. He wrote a comedy, two stories, an essay and a book of travels. His activity was remarkable, his pen fairly scorched the paper. At first he showed his uncle the comedy and one of the stories, asking him if he thought them any good. His uncle glanced through a few pages at random, and sent them back, with an inscription at the top: "They would do for papering partitions."

Alexander was furious, and sent the manuscripts to a magazine, which, however, returned them both. The margins of the comedy were marked in pencil in two places "Not bad," and that was all. The following remarks were frequently to be met with on the margins of the novel:

\* A quotation from *Wit Works Woe*, by Griboyedov.



"weak," "false," "immature," "feeble," "undeveloped," etc., and at the end were the words: "On the whole shows ignorance of the human heart ... unnatural, stilted, no real characters ... the hero absurd ... no such people exist ... not fit for publication. But the author seems to be not without talent, he must work."

"No such people exist!" said the saddened and astonished Alexander. "How can that be? Why, the hero is myself! Surely I don't have to invent the banal characters to be met at every step, to think and feel like the crowd, to do what everyone else does! Wretched persons out of everyday petty tragedies and comedies bear no marks of distinction—is art to sink to this?"

He sought confirmation of the purity of his artistic doctrine by evoking the shade of Byron and referring to Goethe and Schiller. He could imagine no hero for play or novel but a Corsair, a great poet, an artist, who must act and feel as he did himself.

He laid the scene of one of his novels in America. The background was extremely exotic—American landscape, mountains, and amidst them all an exile carrying off his beloved. The whole world had forgotten them. They admired themselves and nature, and when tidings came of pardon and they could have returned to their native land, they refused to go. And twenty years after, some European traveller on a hunting expedition escorted by Red Indians found a hut on a hill-top, and in it a skeleton. This European had once been the rival of the hero. How good Alexander had thought this novel, with what enthusiasm he had read it aloud to Nadya on winter evenings! How eagerly she had listened to him! How could such a novel have been rejected?

He never said a word to Nadya of this failure. He swallowed the injury in silence and consigned it to ob-



livion. "Well, what about your novel?" she asked. "Has it been published?" "No," said he. "It won't do. There's too much in it that seems wild and strange to our people."

If he had only known how truly he had spoken, though all-unconscious of any other interpretation that might have been given to his words.

The very idea of work was alien to him. "What is talent for?" he asked. "The mediocre toiler works. Talent creates with ease and freedom." But recalling that his articles on agriculture, and even his verses, had at first been nothing special, had gradually improved and attracted the attention of the public, he fell to thinking and realized the absurdity of his conclusions, and with a sigh postponed the writing of *belles-lettres* for some other time, when his heart should beat less wildly, his thoughts should be ranged systematically, and when, he vowed, he would work at it properly.

Day followed day, days of unbroken pleasure for Alexander. He was happy when he could kiss the tip of Nadya's finger, sit opposite her or two hours in a picturesque attitude without taking his eyes off her face, moved to his soul, heaving sighs, or declaiming verses suitable to the occasion.

Justice demands the admission that she sometimes replied to sighs and verses with yawns. And no wonder—her heart was engaged, but her mind remained idle. Alexander took no trouble to provide it with food. The year, appointed by Nadya for probation, passed. She was again at the same country-house with her mother. Alexander reminded her of her promise, asked permission to speak to her mother. Nadya wanted to put it off till they went back to town, but Alexander insisted.

One evening, on parting with him, she told Alexander he might speak to her mother the next day.

Alexander did not sleep all night and did not go to work. The thought of the morrow went round and round in his head; he kept thinking of what to say to Marya Mikhailovna, and invented a speech of some sort, but the moment he remembered that it was a matter of Nadya's hand he fell to dreaming, and forgot it all. And he arrived at the country-house in the evening quite unprepared. But nothing was required, after all. When Nadya met him as usual in the garden, there was a shade of thoughtfulness in her eyes, she did not smile and seemed rather absent-minded.

"You mustn't speak to Mamma today," she said. "That horrid count is with her."

"Count? What count?"

"As if you didn't know what count! Count Novinsky, of course, our neighbour. That's his house over there — you have often admired his garden."

"Count Novinsky! Here!" said Alexander in astonishment. "What for?"

"I don't really know myself," replied Nadya. "I was sitting here reading the book you gave me and Mamma was out, she went to Marya Ivanovna. Just as it was beginning to drizzle and I was going into the house, a carriage drove up to the porch, blue with white trimmings, the one that was always passing us, you admired it, don't you remember? I was looking at it, when Mamma came out of it with some man. They went in. Mamma said, 'And this is my daughter, Count—allow me to introduce her.' He bowed and I bowed. I felt quite shy, and blushed and ran to my room. But I heard Mamma—how could she! — say, 'Excuse me, Count—she's a regular little savage.' Then I guessed it must be our neighbour Count Novinsky. He probably brought *Maman* from Marya Ivanovna, in his carriage, on account of the rain."

"Is he ... very old?" asked Alexander.

"Old? Not a bit. Why, he's young and handsome."

"So you managed to discover that he was handsome," said Alexander peevishly.

"I like that! How long does it take to look? I even spoke to him. Oh, he's ever so polite—he asked me what I did, talked about music, asked me to sing something, but I didn't, I can hardly sing at all. This winter I really must get *Maman* to engage a good singing master for me. The count says singing is all the rage now."

All this was said with remarkable animation.

"I thought you would have something else to do this winter, Nadezhda Alexandrovna," remarked Alexander.

"What?"

"What?" repeated Alexander reproachfully.

"Oh—that! Did you come by boat?"

He looked at her in silence. She turned away and went into the house.

Alexander entered the drawing-room not quite at his ease. Who was this count? How ought he to behave in front of him? What would his manners be? Proud? Slighting? Alexander went into the room. The count rose immediately and bowed politely. Alexander responded with a forced, awkward bow. The hostess introduced them. Somehow Alexander did not like the count, who was, however, a fine-looking man—tall, slim, fair-haired, with large expressive eyes and a pleasant smile. His manners were simple, elegant and suave. He seemed a man fit to win the favour of anyone, but he did not win Alexander's.

Although Marya Mikhailovna asked him to sit down near her, Alexander took a seat in the corner of the room

and took up a book, which was most ill-bred, awkward and unsuitable. Nadya stood by her mother's chair looking with interest at the count, and listening to what he said and how he said it. He was something new for her.

Alexander was unable to conceal the fact that he did not like the count. But the count did not seem to have noticed his rudeness—he was extremely polite, turning to Alexander as he spoke, and trying to make the conversation general. All in vain—Alexander either said nothing at all or answered in monosyllables.

When Madame Lyubetskaya chanced to mention his name the count asked if he was not related to Pyotr Ivanich.

"He's my uncle," replied Alexander abruptly.

"I often meet him in society," said the count.

"No doubt. That's nothing to wonder at," replied Alexander, shrugging his shoulders.

The count suppressed a smile, biting his underlip ever so slightly. Nadya exchanged glances with her mother, and blushed, lowering her eyes.

"Your uncle is an agreeable, clever man," remarked the count in a tone of light irony.

Alexander made no reply.

Unable to restrain herself, Nadya went up to Alexander and under cover of the conversation between the count and her mother, whispered in his ear, "You ought to be ashamed. The count is so kind to you, and you—"

"Kind!" repeated Alexander angrily and almost audibly. "I have no need of his kindness, don't use that word."

Nadya retreated from him hastily and looked long and steadily at him from a little distance, her eyes wide-open, then she again took up her position behind her mother's chair and no longer paid any attention to Alexander.

But Alexander kept waiting for the count to go so that he could at last speak to Nadya's mother. But ten o'clock struck and then eleven, and the count, far from leaving, went on and on talking.

All the subjects around which the conversation usually hovers at the beginning of an acquaintance, had been exhausted. The count began to make jokes. He did it very well—there was not a trace of anything forced, no pretension to wit, in his jokes, only a peculiarly amusing way of relating, not so much an anecdote, as some fact or incident which was new to his hearers or, with a single unexpected word, he turned a serious thing into something comic.

Both mother and daughter gave themselves up completely to the charm of his jokes, and Alexander himself more than once had to hide an involuntary smile with his book. But he was inwardly furious.

The count discussed everything with equal skill and tact—music, people, foreign parts. The talk turned on men and women—he criticized men, including himself, artfully praised women in general, and paid his hostesses in particular a few compliments.

Alexander remembered his literary work, his verses. "There's where I could go one better than him," he told himself. The talk turned on literature; the mother and daughter mentioned that Alexander was a writer.

"Now he'll sing small," thought Alexander.

But not a bit of it. The count spoke of literature as if he had never occupied himself with anything else. He made a few remarks, casual but just, about modern Russian and French celebrities. To crown all it appeared he was on intimate terms with the best Russian writers, and had made the acquaintance of certain French writers when in Paris. Of some he spoke with respect,

others he described with a slight touch of caricature. He said he did not know Alexander's poetry, had never heard of it.

Nadya looked a bit queerly at Alexander as if asking: "What, my friend? You haven't gone very far...."

Alexander was abashed. His rude and insolent expression gave place to one of dejection. He was like a cock with a wet tail, trying to shelter from the rain under an awning.

The sound of glasses and spoons came from the dining-room, where the table was being laid, and still the count stayed on. All hope was gone. He actually accepted Madame Lyubetskaya's invitation to stay and have sour milk for supper.

"A count, and eats sour milk," whispered Alexander, glancing venomously at him.

The count supped with appetite, joking all the time, evidently feeling quite at home.

"Never been in the house before, and eats for three, the shameless thing!" Alexander whispered in Nadya's ear.

"He's *hungry*," she replied in all simplicity.

At last the count went away, but it was now too late for a serious talk. Alexander picked up his hat and fled. Nadya ran after him and managed to soothe him.

"Tomorrow, then?" said Alexander.

"We won't be at home tomorrow."

"Well—the day after."

They parted.

Alexander arrived earlier than usual on the appointed day. Unfamiliar sounds reached him from the house while he was still in the garden. What was it—could it be a 'cello? As he drew nearer he made out the sounds of a man's voice—and what a voice! Resonant, fresh,

it seemed to be making straight for a woman's heart. It reached the heart of Alexander, but in a different manner—his heart seemed to be petrified, ached with melancholy, envy, hatred, with some vague but heavy foreboding. Alexander entered the hall from the back yard.

"Who's here?" he asked the footman.

"Count Novinsky."

"Has he been here long?"

"Since six."

"Tell Miss Nadezhda quietly that I came, and will call later."

"Yes, sir."

Alexander turned on his heel and set off to roam around the houses scattered about, scarcely noticing where he was going. Two hours later he returned to the house.

"Still here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. And I think the count is staying to supper. The mistress ordered roast partridge."

"Did you tell Miss Nadezhda I called?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did she say?"

"She didn't say anything."

Alexander went home and did not put in an appearance for two days. God knows what were his thoughts and feelings during that time. At last he went again.

When he caught sight of the house he stood up in the boat, screening his eyes with his hand from the sun's rays, and gazing ahead. There was the blue dress flitting between the trees—the dress that sat so well on Nadya, how blue suited her! She always wore that dress when she wanted Alexander to admire her specially. A weight was lifted from his heart.

"Oh, she wants to console me for her temporary, involuntary neglect," he told himself. "It was my fault,



not hers. My behaviour was unpardonable. It only puts people against me. A stranger, a new acquaintance.... It was only natural that, as the hostess, she— Ah, there she comes from behind that bush along the narrow path, she's going to the railings, she'll stand and wait there."

Sure enough she came out into the broad alley... but who was that with her?

"The count!" exclaimed Alexander ruefully, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"Eh?" said one of the boatmen.

"Alone in the garden with him," whispered Alexander. "Just as she used to be with me."

Nadya and the count went up to the gate and, without a glance towards the river, turned and strolled back along the alley. He was bending over her, talking in a low voice. She walked beside him with her head bent.

Alexander stood some time in the boat with his mouth open, motionless, his hands stretched towards the bank, and then, letting them fall, sat down again. The boatmen went on rowing.

"Where are you going?" Alexander shouted at them furiously. "Back!"

"Are we to go back?" one of them asked, gaping and staring at him.

"Back, I said. You're not deaf, are you?"

"And we're not to go over there?"

The other boatman began silently and rapidly pulling at one oar, then struck out with both, and the boat was propelled in the opposite direction. Alexander pulled his hat down almost to his shoulders and plunged into anguished thought.

After this he did not go to the Lyubetskys' for a whole fortnight.

Two weeks—what a long time for a man in love! But he waited all the time—surely they would send someone to find out what was the matter with him. He might be ill. They had always done so before, if he was indisposed or in a bad temper. Nadya would begin with an official inquiry in her mother's name, and afterwards continue in her own name. The sweet reproaches, the tender anxiety! The impatience!

"I shan't yield at once, this time," Alexander told himself. "I'll torture her a little. I'll teach her how to behave with a strange man. The reconciliation won't be so easy."

And he thought out a ruthless scheme for vengeance, dreamed of her remorse, and of his generous forgiveness and the scolding he would give her. But nobody came to him, nobody brought him apologies. He seemed no longer to exist for them.

He grew thin and pale. Jealousy is the most agonizing of diseases, especially when it is founded on mere groundless suspicions. When proofs are forthcoming it is the end of jealousy, and, for the greater part, of love itself; then at least the lover knows what to do, but till then—torture. And Alexander experienced it to the full.

At last he made up his mind to go there in the morning, thinking to find Nadya alone and have it out with her.

He arrived. There was nobody in the garden, in the great hall, or in the drawing-room. He went into the hall and opened the back door...

What a sight met his eyes in the yard! Two grooms in the count's livery were holding saddle horses. On one of these the count and a servant were helping Nadya to mount; the other was being held in readiness for the

count himself. On the steps of the porch stood Marya Mikhailovna. She was watching the scene with evident anxiety, her brow wrinkled.

"Sit firmly, Nadya," she said. "Look after her, Count, for God's sake. I'm so nervous about her. Hold on to the horse's ear, Nadya—look what a devil it is, spinning like a top."

"It's all right, *Maman*," said Nadya gaily. "I know how to ride. Look!"

She lashed the horse with her whip, so that it plunged forward, fidgeting and straining at the reins.

"Oh, oh! Hold it back!" cried Marya Mikhailovna, with a helpless gesture. "Stop—it'll kill you."

But Nadya jerked the reins and the horse stood still.

"Look how she obeys me!" said Nadya and stroked the horse's neck.

Nobody noticed Alexander. Pale and silent he gazed at Nadya who, as if in mockery, had never been so beautiful. How the riding-suit and that hat with the green veil became her! How graceful the lines of her waist were! Her face seemed to be suffused with shy pride and the joyous new sensations. Blushes came and went on her cheeks, so happy she was. The horse gave a light bound, forcing the slender rider to bend gracefully, and then lean backwards. Her figure swayed in the saddle like the stalk of a flower stirred by the breeze. Then the groom brought up the count's horse.

"Shall we go through the copse again, Count?" asked Nadya.

"Again!" thought Alexander.

"That would be very nice," replied the count.

The horses started.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna!" cried Alexander suddenly, wildly.

Everyone came to a standstill as if turned to stone, and gazed in astonishment at Alexander. This lasted almost a minute.

"Oh, it's Alexander Fyodorich," said the mother, who was the first to regain presence of mind. The count bowed civilly. Nadya flung her veil off her face, turned and looked at him in terror, her little mouth half-open, and then turned away quickly, whipping up her horse, which strained forward and disappeared through the gate in a couple of bounds; the count followed her close.

"Not so fast, for God's sake!" the mother cried after them. "Hold on to its ear. Dear God! Oh, my Lord! She'll fall—I know she will. What's taken possession of her?"

And it was all over. There was nothing to be heard but the sound of hoofs, nothing to be seen but a column of dust rising from the road. Alexander remained alone with Madame Lyubetskaya. He looked at her in silence, as if asking, "What does it all mean?" And she did not keep him waiting for an answer.

"They've gone," she said, "gone without leaving a trace. Oh, well, youth must have its fling, and you and I can have a talk, Alexander Fyodorich. How is it there's been no sign from you for the last two weeks? Don't you love us any more?"

"I've been ill, Marya Mikhailovna," he replied morosely.

"Anyone can see that—you're so pale and thin. Sit down at once and have a rest—wouldn't you like me to order some soft-boiled eggs? It's a long time till dinner."

"Thanks—I don't want anything."

"Why not? They'd be ready in a minute, they're lovely eggs. A Finnish peasant brought them only today."

"No, thank you."

"What's the matter with you? I kept waiting and waiting and wondering what it meant—you don't come yourself, and you don't bring us any French novels. Don't you remember promising us something—*Peau de Chagrin* or something of the sort? I waited and waited, but no. Alexander Fyodorich doesn't love us any more, I said to myself, he doesn't really."

"I'm afraid it's you who don't love me any more, Marya Mikhailovna."

"It's a sin to talk like that, Alexander Fyodorich! I love you like my own son. I don't know about Nadya—she's still a child, what does she understand? How can she appreciate people? I tell her every day, 'how is it we never see Alexander Fyodorich, why doesn't he come?' And I kept expecting you. Believe it or not, I never sat down to dinner till five o'clock every day. I kept thinking: he'll be here any minute. Nadya herself sometimes said, 'Who are you waiting for, Mamma? I'm hungry and I think the count is too.'"

"And does the count come here very often?" asked Alexander.

"Almost every day, and sometimes twice a day. He's so kind, he's become so fond of us. And so Nadya says, 'I'm hungry, and that's all. Time to sit down to dinner.' 'And supposing Alexander Fyodorich comes?' 'He won't,' she says. 'I bet you anything he won't. It's no good waiting.'" These words of Madame Lyubetskaya were like a knife in Alexander's heart.

"Is that what she said?" he asked, forcing a smile.

"Yes, those were her very words, that's just how she hurried me. I'm very strict, even if I do look so good-natured. I scolded her: 'Sometimes you wait for him till five without dinner, another time you don't want to wait for him at all. Silly girl! That's not nice. Alex-

ander Fyodorich is our old friend, he was fond of us, and his uncle, Pyotr Ivanich, has shown us much kindness. It's not nice to neglect him. He may get angry and stop coming to see us."

"And what did she say?" asked Alexander.

"Oh, nothing. You know how lively she is—she jumps up and sings, or runs up to me, saying, 'He'll come if he wants to.' Such a giddy thing! And I thought: he'll come. And another day passes—and you don't come. So I say again, 'I wonder if Alexander Fyodorich is all right, Nadya?' 'I don't know, Mamma,' she says, 'how am I to know?' 'Let's send and find out how he is!' We keep saying we'll send but we never do. I forgot, I relied on her and she's no more reliable than the wind. And now she's all for this horse-riding. She saw the count through the window on horseback once, and kept on and on at me, 'I want to ride and that's all about it.' I did all I could to stop her but no—'I want to!' Madcap! We didn't ride when I was a girl. That's not how we were brought up at all. But nowadays—oh, horror!—ladies have actually begun to smoke! There's<sup>1</sup> a young widow living over the way there—she sits on the balcony all day smoking cigarettes. People walk by, drive past, and she doesn't care a bit. Why, in my young days if a gentleman so much as smelled of tobacco in the drawing-room—"

"And has this been going on long?" asked Alexander.

"I don't know—they say it became the fashion five or six years ago—it all comes from the French."

"No, I mean—has Nadezhda Alexandrovna been riding long?"

"About ten days. The count's so kind, so obliging. What wouldn't he do for us? How he spoils her! Look at all these flowers—all from his garden. Sometimes I feel

quite ashamed. 'Why do you spoil her so, Count? There'll be no holding her soon.' And I scold her. Marya Ivanovna and I, yes and Nadya, too, were at his stables. I always keep watch over her myself, you know—after all, nobody can look after a daughter as a mother does! I brought her up myself and I may say without boasting — there aren't many such daughters. And Nadya learned in front of us. Then we had lunch in his garden and now they go riding every day. And what a fine house he has! We went over it—such taste, such luxury!"

"Every day!" said Alexander, half to himself.

"Well, why shouldn't she enjoy herself? I was young myself once... sometimes I—"

"And do they stay out long?"

"Three hours or so. Come now, what's been the matter with you?"

"I don't know. I have a kind of pain in my chest," he said, pressing his hand to his heart.

"Don't you do anything for it?"

"No."

"Oh, you young people! It's all nothing, but the day comes, and then you suddenly see how time is passing! Is it an aching pain, or a stabbing pain?"

"Aching and stabbing," said Alexander abstractedly.

"That's a chill. For God's sake don't neglect it, you might fall ill, it might turn to pneumonia! And you take no medicine. I'll tell you what —take some opodeldoc and rub your chest hard with it every night, rub till the skin gets red, and don't drink tea, drink herbs—I'll give you a recipe."

Nadya came back pale with fatigue. She flung herself on the sofa, almost breathless.

"Look at her," said Marya Mikhailovna, laying her hand on the girl's forehead. "She's so tired she can



hardly breathe. Drink some water and go and change and loosen your corset. Nothing good will come of this riding."

Alexander and the count stayed all day. The count was invariably courteous and attentive to Alexander, invited him to come and see his garden, to share the rides, offered him a horse.

"I can't ride," said Alexander coldly.

"Can't you?" said Nadya. "Oh, it's such fun! We'll go out again tomorrow, won't we, Count?"

The count bowed.

"That'll do, Nadya," said her mother. "You're giving the count trouble."

There was, however, nothing to point to the existence of any special relations between the count and Nadya. He was equally courteous to mother and daughter, sought no opportunity to be alone with Nadya, did not follow her into the garden, looked at her just as he looked at her mother. The ease with which she treated him, the daily rides might be put down, as far as she was concerned, to wildness and unsteadiness of character, perhaps to innocence, lack of breeding, ignorance of the ways of society; as for her mother, it was all perhaps weakness and lack of foresight. The courtesy and obligingness of the count and his daily visits might be attributed to the nearness of the two houses, and the cordial reception he always met with at the Lyubetskys'.

To the unaided eye the matter seemed natural enough. But Alexander looked through a magnifying glass and saw much that the naked eye did not.

He asked himself why Nadya had changed towards him?

She no longer waited for him in the garden, she met him with alarm instead of with a smile, and had of late begun to be much more particular about her clothes. No

more familiarity in her manners. She was more careful of what she did, as if she had grown more reasonable. Every now and then there was something in her eyes and beneath her words which resembled a secret. Where were the sweet whims, the wildness, the pranks, the playfulness? They had all vanished. She had become grave, thoughtful, silent. It seemed as if she had something on her mind. Now she was just like all other girls—hypocritical like them, telling lies as they do, anxiously inquiring after one's health... always obliging, outwardly courteous—to him, to Alexander... and to whom else? Oh, God! He felt a pang at his heart.

"All this means something," he kept assuring himself. "There's more in it than meets the eye. I will find out what it is at all costs, and then woe to—"

*I will not let the foul seducer  
With his ungodly, wicked art  
Pervert that innocent young heart.  
That such a villain should endeavour  
Exerting all his poisoned power  
To blight a half-unfolded flower,  
To mar its loveliness forever..."*

And that very day, when the count had gone, Alexander tried to find a moment to speak to Nadya in private. What didn't he do? He picked up the book with which she had formerly called him away from her mother, held it up for her to see and went towards the river-bank, thinking she would come running after him. But he waited and waited, and she did not come. He went back to the house. She was sitting reading and did not look up when he came in. He sat down beside her. She did not raise her eyes, and after a moment asked him in rapid

casual tones if he was writing anything, if anything new of his had come out. Not a word of the past.

He began talking to her mother. Nadya went into the garden. Her mother left the room and Alexander, too, rushed into the garden. Catching sight of him, Nadya got up from the bench and went, not to meet him, but walked slowly along the alley surrounding the garden, towards the house, as if to avoid him. He hastened his steps, and she did, too.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna," he called to her from the distance. "I should like to say a word to you."

"Come into the house—it's damp here," she replied.

When she got back she again sat down beside her mother. Alexander felt he was going to faint.

"And since when have you begun to be afraid of damp?" he asked spitefully.

"The evenings are so dark and cold now," she answered, yawning.

"We'll be going back to town soon," said her mother. "Alexander Fyodorich, would you be so kind as to go to our flat and remind the landlord to mend two locks on the door, and repair the shutter in Nadya's bedroom? He promised to, but he's sure to forget. They're all the same—all they think about is money."

Alexander rose to take his leave.

"Mind, don't stay away so long, this time!" said Marya Mikhailovna.

Nadya said nothing.

At the door he turned towards her. She took a few steps towards him. His heart leaped.

"At last!" he thought.

"Are you coming tomorrow?" she asked coldly, but her eyes were fixed on him with eager curiosity.

"I don't know. Why?"

"I just asked. Are you?"

"D'you want me to?"

"Are you coming tomorrow?" she repeated in the same cold tones, but with a shade more impatience.

"No," he replied irately.

"And the day after?"

"No, I won't come for a whole week, two perhaps ... a long time." And fixing a searching glance on her he tried to read in her eyes the impression produced by his reply.

She said nothing, but dropped her eyes as he answered, and what was in them—were they dimmed by sorrow, or did a flash of joy light them up for a moment?—it was impossible to read anything on that beautiful marble countenance.

Alexander squeezed his hat in his hand and went out.

"Don't forget to rub your chest with opodeldoc!" Marya Mikhailovna called after him.

And again Alexander was faced with a problem—to discover what Nadya's question had meant. What was concealed beneath it—the desire to see him, or the fear of seeing him?

"It's agony! Agony!" he exclaimed despairingly.

Poor Alexander could not hold out—three days later he went there again. Nadya was standing at the gate when his boat approached. He was just beginning to rejoice, but as he got nearer the bank she turned, pretending not to see him, and after taking a few uncertain steps along the path, as if she were merely out for a stroll, returned to the house.

He found her with her mother. There were a few visitors from town there, as well as their neighbour Marya Ivanovna, and the inevitable count. Alexander's sufferings were unendurable. Another whole day passed in empty trivial conversation. How tired he was of the visitors!

They chatted serenely about all sorts of trifles, arguing, joking, and laughing incessantly. "They can laugh," thought Alexander, "when ... Nadya ... has changed to me. It's nothing to them! Wretched empty souls—anything amuses them!"

Nadya went into the garden; the count did not follow her. Of late he and Nadya seemed to avoid one another in Alexander's presence. He sometimes found them in the garden or in a room, alone, but they soon parted, and so long as he was there did not come together again. A new and terrible discovery for Alexander—a sign that they were in connivance.

The guests went. The count went, too. Nadya, who was in the garden, did not know this and did not hasten back to the house. Alexander left Marya Mikhailovna unceremoniously and went into the garden. Nadya was standing with her back to him holding on to the railings with one hand, with her head propped on the other, as on that unforgettable evening. She neither saw him nor heard his approach.

How his heart beat as he crept up to her on tiptoe! He almost stopped breathing.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna," he said, his voice almost inaudible from agitation.

She started as if a pistol had gone off near her, turned, and retreated a step from him.

"Look—what's that smoke?" she said, in evident embarrassment, pointing eagerly at the opposite side of the river. "Is it a fire, or a furnace in the factory?"

He looked at her in silence.

"I thought it was a fire, really I did. Why do you look at me like that, don't you believe me?"

She paused.

"You, too!" he began. "Just like the rest! Who could have thought it—two months ago?"

"What d'you mean? I don't understand you," she said, and made as if to go.

"Wait, Nadezhda Alexandrovna, I can no longer bear this torture."

"What torture? Really I don't know."

"Don't pretend! Tell me—can this be you? Are you the same as you used to be?"

"I'm the same as ever," she said sturdily.

"What? You haven't changed to me?"

"No. I think I'm as nice to you as I always was, I'm always glad to see you."

"Just as glad! Then why do you run away from the fence?"

"Me run away? What will you say next? I stand at the railings, and you say—run away."

She gave a forced laugh.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna, stop this hypocrisy," Alexander continued.

"Hypocrisy? Why d'you keep nagging at me?"

"Can this be you? My God! Six weeks ago, in this very place—"

"What's that smoke over there I should like to know."

"Awful! Awful!" said Alexander.

"Well, what have I done to you? You've stopped coming to us—that's your business ... no one wants to keep you against your will," began Nadya.

"Always pretending! As if you did not know why I stopped coming!"

Looking aside, she shook her head.

"And the count?" he brought out at last in tones which were almost threatening.

"What count?"

She made a face and tried to look as if she had never heard of the count.

"Well," he said, looking her straight in the eyes, "will you tell me you are indifferent to him?"

"You must be mad!" she replied, retreating from him.

"You're not far wrong," he pursued. "My reason is failing with every day. How could you behave so insidiously, so ungratefully to one who loved you more than the whole world, who forgot all for your sake, all ... who expected soon to be made happy for life, and you...."

"Well, what about me?" she said, retreating still further from him.

"What about you?" he countered, infuriated by her coolness. "Have you forgotten? I will remind you that here, on this very spot, you swore a thousand times to belong to me. 'God hears these vows,' you said. Yes. He did hear them. You will have to blush before this sky, before these trees, before every blade of grass ... everything that witnessed our happiness. Every grain of sand here speaks of our love. Look, look around you! You are perjurer!"

She gazed at him in horror. His eyes gleamed, his lips turned white.

"How unkind you are!" she said timidly. "What are you angry about? I haven't refused you, you haven't spoken to *Maman* yet ... how do you know?"

"Speak—after all you have done?"

"All what? I don't know."

"Allow me to tell you then! What is the meaning of these rendezvous with the count, these rides?"

"Ought I to have run away from him every time *Maman* went out of the room? And the rides mean—that I like riding ... it's such fun. When you gallop—oh, what a darling horse that Lucy is! Did you see her? She knows me already!"



"And the change in your behaviour to me?" he went on. "Why is the count at your house every day, from morning till night?"

"Oh, my God, how do I know? How absurd you are! *Maman* likes it."

"It's not true. Your *Maman* likes what you like. All those presents—the music, the albums, the flowers—are they all for *Maman*?"

"Yes. *Maman* loves flowers. She bought some yesterday from the gardener."

"And what are you always whispering to him about?" went on Alexander, not heeding her words. "See! You turn pale, you feel yourself that you are to blame. To destroy a man's happiness, to forget, to end everything so quickly, so easily... hypocrisy, ingratitude, lies, treachery... yes, treachery! How could you sink so low? The rich count, the society lion, only has to bend a favourable eye on you, and you melt, prostrate yourself before this tawdry sun. Where's your shame? The count must not come here any more," he said breathlessly. "D'you hear me? Give him up, break off all relations with him, let him forget the way to your house! I won't have it!"

He seized her hand in his fury.

"*Maman! Maman!* Come here!" cried Nadya in piercing tones, tearing herself from his grasp and rushing headlong towards the house.

He sat down on the bench and clutched his head in his hands.

She ran into the house, pale, terrified, and sank into a chair.

"What's the matter? Why did you shout?" asked her mother, who had come out to meet her, in alarm.

"Alexander Fyodorich is—unwell," she brought out with difficulty.

"But why were you so frightened?"

"He's so terrible ... *Maman*, don't let him come to me, for God's sake!"

"How you frightened me, you crazy thing! Well, what if he is ill? I know he has a pain in his chest. What's so terrible about that? It's not consumption. Rub it with opodeldoc and it'll go. I suppose he didn't obey me, didn't rub himself."

Alexander came to his senses. His fever passed but his tortures were redoubled. He had cleared up none of his doubts, and only frightened Nadya, and now of course he would never get an answer out of her. He had not managed the affair well. As a lover will, he suddenly asked himself: "Supposing she is not to blame? Perhaps she really does not care for the count! Her foolish mother invites him every day, and what can she do? As a man of the world, he is polite. Nadya is a pretty girl. He may want to make her fall in love with him, but it by no means follows that she is in love with him. Perhaps it's the flowers and the rides, the innocent amusement she likes, and not the count himself. Even admitting that there is a little coquetry in all this, after all isn't it pardonable? Older people than she do all sorts of things."

He rested and a ray of happiness shone in his soul. All lovers are the same—blind and over-discerning by turns. And then it is so delightful to acquit the beloved.

"But why has she changed in her behaviour to me?" he asked himself suddenly, and again went pale. "Why does she avoid me, does not speak to me, seem to be ashamed? Why was she all dressed up yesterday—when they were not expecting visitors? No one came but the count. Why did she ask if the ballet season would soon begin? Quite a simple question, but Alexander remembered that the count had promised quite casually to get a box

for every performance, whatever the difficulty, so it meant he would be with them. Why did she leave the garden yesterday? Why didn't she go into the garden? Why did she ask this, why did she not ask that?"

And once more he was plunged in painful doubt, once more suffered agonies, and came to the conclusion that Nadya had never loved him at all.

"My God, my God," he cried in despair. "How hard, how bitter life is! Grant me deathly tranquillity, that slumber of the soul...."

Fifteen minutes later he went into the house, dejected and apprehensive.

"Good-bye, Nadezhda Alexandrovna," he said timidly.

"Good-bye," she said abruptly, not raising her eyes.

"When may I come again?"

"Whenever you like. Oh, yes, but—we shall be going back to town next week. We'll let you know."

He took his leave. Over two weeks passed. Everyone had gone back to town. The aristocratic salons scintillated again. The official lit the bracket lamps in his drawing-room, bought half a pood of tallow candles, set out two card tables, in expectation of a visit from Stepan Ivanich and Ivan Stepanich, and told his wife that their at-home day would be Tuesday.

And Alexander still received no invitation from the Lyubetskys'. Once he met their chef and their housemaid. The housemaid, seeing him, ran away; evidently she was acting in the spirit of her young mistress. The chef stopped.

"Have you forgotten us, Sir?" he asked. "We've been back over a week."

"Perhaps you're not settled down yet, not receiving?"

"Oh, yes, we are, Sir. Everybody's called excepting you. The mistress is always wondering why you don't

come. His Excellency calls every day ... such a kind gentleman! I took a little notebook to him from the young mistress the other day, and he gave me a handsome tip."

"You fool, you!" said Alexander, and fled from the chatterbox.

That evening he passed the Lyubetskys' house. It was lighted up. At the door was a carriage.

"Whose carriage is it?" he asked.

"Count Novinsky's."

The next day and the next the same thing happened. But at last he went to call. The mother received him cordially, with reproaches for his absence, scolding him for not rubbing his chest with opodeldoc. Nadya was calm, the count courteous. The conversation halted.

He called two or three times again. In vain he gazed expressively at Nadya; she seemed not to notice his glances, and how she used to notice them formerly! Sometimes when he stood talking to Marya Mikhailovna, Nadya would get behind her mother's chair and make faces at him, fooling about and trying to make him laugh.

He was plunged in intolerable melancholy. All he thought about was how to throw off this cross he had himself undertaken to bear. All he wanted was to get an explanation.

"Whatever the answer," he told himself. "Anything to turn doubt into certainty."

He pondered long how to tackle the situation, and at last, having come to a decision, went to the Lyubetskys'.

Everything was in his favour. There was no carriage at the door. He went quietly through the ball-room and stood for a moment at the door of the drawing-room, to pull himself together. Nadya was at the piano, playing. On the other side of the room her mother was seated on a sofa, knitting a scarf. Nadya, hearing footsteps in the

ball-room, went on playing more quietly, her head bent forward. She awaited the appearance of the visitor with a smile. The visitor appeared and the smile instantly vanished, its place taken by a look of terror. She changed countenance slightly and got up. This was not the visitor she was expecting.

Alexander bowed silently and passed like a shadow towards the mother. He walked quietly, without his previous confidence, with a drooping head. Nadya sat down and went on playing, looking over her shoulder anxiously every now and then.

Half an hour later something took her mother from the room. Alexander went up to Nadya. She rose as if to go.

"Nadezhda Alexandrovna," he said disconsolately. "Wait, give me five minutes, no more!"

"I won't listen to you!" she said, and again made as if to go. "Last time you were so—"

"I was wrong then. I will be quite different now, I promise you. You will not hear a single reproach. Do not refuse to hear me, it may be for the last time. There must be an explanation—you did say I could ask your mother for your hand, you know. After this, so much has happened that ... in a word—I must repeat my question. Sit down and go on playing. It would be better for your mother not to hear. It isn't the first time, you know."

She obeyed him mechanically. Blushing slightly she struck a few chords and fixed her eyes on him in anxious anticipation.

"Where are you, Alexander Fyodorich?" asked the mother, who had gone back to her place.

"I wanted to speak to Nadezhda Alexandrovna about ... literature," he replied.

"Go on then, do. It's really quite a long time since you've had a talk,"

"Only give me a brief sincere answer to one question," he began in low tones. "And our explanation will be over. Don't you love me any more?"

"*Quelle idée*," she replied in some confusion. "You know how much *Maman* and I have always valued your friendship ... how glad we always were to see you."

Alexander looked at her, thinking: "Can this be the mischievous, open-hearted child, the rollicking tomboy I knew? How quickly she has learned to dissemble! How swiftly her feminine instincts have developed! Can it be that those dainty whims were only the seeds of hypocrisy and cunning? See how rapidly that girl has become a woman, without the help of my uncle's methods! And it's all the count's school, and all in a mere two or three months. Oh, Uncle, Uncle! Here too you were mercilessly right!"

"Now listen," he said in a voice that made the little hypocrite drop her mask in a trice. "Never mind *Maman* – just for a moment be the old Nadya, who used to love me a little ... and answer frankly—I must know, I must, by God!"

She said nothing, but changed the music and began gazing hard at it and practising a difficult passage.

"Very well, I will put the question differently," went on Alexander. "Tell me, has not someone, someone who shall be nameless, has not someone taken my place in your heart?"

She snuffed the candle, fidgeting long with the wick, but said nothing.

"Answer me, Nadezhda Alexandrovna –one word will relieve my agony, and save you from an unpleasant explanation."

"Stop, for God's sake! What am I to say to you? I have nothing to say," she replied, turning away.



Another man would have been content with this reply, and realized that there was nothing for him to do. He would have understood all, from the inarticulate sorrow stamped on her face, showing in all her movements. But Alexander was not satisfied. Like an executioner he tortured his victim, and forced himself, inspired by wild, desperate desire, to drink the cup to the dregs.

"Come!" he said. "Put an end today to this torture! Doubts, black doubts, disturb my mind, tear at my heart. I'm worn out! I feel as if my bosom would burst under the strain! I have no way of confirming my suspicions. You must come to a decision, otherwise I shall never know quiet."

He looked at her expectantly. She said nothing.

"Have mercy on me!" he began again. "Look at me—am I like myself? People are shocked, they don't recognize me. Everyone pities me, you alone..."

And indeed—his eyes shone with a wild light. He was thin, pale, beads of sweat stood on his brow.

She glanced at him furtively and something like pity flickered in her glance. She actually took his hand, but dropped it immediately with a sigh, and maintained her silence.

"Well?" he asked.

"Oh, leave me in peace!" she said miserably. "You're tormenting me with your questions."

"I implore you, for God's sake!" he said. "End everything with a single word! What's the good of all this secrecy? A grain of foolish hope remains with me, I will not desist, I will appear before you daily, pale, agitated.... I will make you miserable. Shut the door on me, I will roam beneath your windows, meet you at the theatre, in the street, everywhere, like a ghost, like a *memento mori*. This may all be very foolish, ridiculous.



Some may find it funny, but to me it is painful. You don't know what passion means, what it can drive one to. God grant you never may! What's the good? Wouldn't it be better to say it straight out?"

"But what is it you want to know?" said Nadya, throwing herself back in her chair. "I'm all confused ... my mind is in a fog."

She pressed her hand feverishly to her forehead, and immediately removed it.

"I ask you—has anyone taken my place in your heart? One word—*yes*, or *no*—will settle everything. Surely that won't take long to say."

She tried to speak but could not, and, lowering her eyes, began striking a key with her finger again and again. It was obvious that a violent struggle was going on within her. "Oh!" she at last uttered grievously. Alexander mopped his brow with his handkerchief.

"Yes or no?" he repeated, holding his breath.

A few seconds passed.

"Yes or no?"

"Yes," whispered Nadya almost inaudibly, and bent well over the keyboard, striking loud chords as if in a kind of trance. The "Yes" was scarcely more distinct than a sigh, but it deafened Alexander. His heart seemed to be torn from its roots, his knees gave way. He sank on to a chair beside the piano, and said nothing.

Nadya glanced at him in alarm. He was staring at her blankly.

"Alexander Fyodorich!" suddenly called the mother from her room. "Which ear is buzzing?"

He did not answer.

"*Maman* is speaking to you," said Nadya.

"Eh?"

"Which ear is buzzing?" cried out the mother. "Quick!"

"Both," said Alexander sombrely.

"Oh, you—the left, of course! I've been guessing whether the count will come today."

"The count," repeated Alexander.

"Forgive me!" said Nadya in imploring tones, rushing up to him. "I don't understand myself. Everything came about by chance, against my will. I don't know how... I couldn't deceive you."

"I will keep my word, Nadezhda Alexandrovna," he said. "I will not make you a single reproach. Thank you for your frankness. You have done much, very much, to-day. It was hard for me to hear that 'Yes'... but still harder for you to say it. Farewell—you will not see me any more. That will be a reward for your sincerity. But the count, the count!"

He set his teeth and moved towards the door.

Then he came back and said, "But where will all this lead you? The count will not marry you. What are his intentions?"

"I don't know," said Nadya, shaking her head sorrowfully.

"Oh, God, how blind you are!" exclaimed Alexander, in horror.

"His intentions cannot be evil," she said in a weak voice.

"Beware, Nadezhda Alexandrovna!"

He took her hand, kissed it, and went unsteadily out of the room. He was a pitiable sight. Nadya remained motionless in her place.

"Why don't you play, Nadya?" asked her mother a few minutes later.

Nadya sighed, as if awakened from a deep sleep.

"One minute, *Maman*!" she replied and, her head pensively on one side, began irresolutely picking out a few

notes. Her fingers trembled. She was obviously suffering from remorse and from the doubt aroused in her by the word "Beware!" When the count arrived she was taciturn and dull. There was something forced in her manner. Under the pretext of a headache she went early to her room. And that night life appeared a bitter thing to her.

Hardly had Alexander got to the bottom of the stairs when his powers deserted him. He sat down on the last step, covered his eyes with his handkerchief and broke out into loud tearless sobs. Just then the yardman passed the porch door. He stood still, listening.

"Marfa, come here!" he cried, going to the greasy door of the lodge. "Come here, listen! There's someone bellowing like a bull. I thought it was our Arapka broken her chain, but no, it's not Arapka."

"No, that's not Arapka," said Marfa, listening. "What can it be?"

"Go and get the lantern—it's hanging behind the stove."

Marfa brought the lantern.

"Still crying?" she asked.

"Yes, yes! Can it be some thief has got in?"

"Who's there?" cried the yardman.

No answer.

"Who's there?" echoed Marfa.

But the sobbing continued. Suddenly they both came in. Alexander ran out of the house.

"Why, it's a gentleman!" cried Marfa, looking after him. "And you thought it was a thief! You couldn't think of anything cleverer to say! As if a thief would cry in a strange porch!"

"Then he must be drunk."

"Better and better!" said Marfa. "You judge everyone by yourself. All drunks don't cry like you."

"Well, what's the matter with him then—he isn't hungry, is he?" said the yardman crossly.

"What!" said Marfa, looking at him unable to find an answer. "Who can say—perhaps he's dropped something—some money...."

They both squatted down and began, by the light of the lantern, feeling in all the corners of the porch.

"Dropped something!" growled the yardman, holding the lamp low over the floor. "How could he drop anything here? The steps are clean, made of stone, you could see a needle on them—dropped something. He'd have heard if anything dropped. It would rattle on the stones. He'd have picked it up, wouldn't he? Where could he have dropped something here? There isn't anything! Dropped! Dropped, indeed! Not the sort to drop anything, he isn't! No—that sort is more likely to find a way of putting things in his own pocket! Dropped! I know them, the rogues! Dropped, indeed! Where could he have dropped anything?"

And they groped on the floor for a long time, seeking for the lost money.

"Nothing there," said the yardman at last with a sigh, and blew out the light, nipping the wick between his two fingers and wiping them on his sheepskin jacket.

## VI

That same night, at about twelve o'clock, when Pyotr Ivanich, a candlestick and a book in one hand, the other hand holding up the skirts of his dressing-gown, was going out of his study to his bedroom, his manservant told him that Alexander Fyodorich wished to see him.

Pyotr Ivanich knitted his brows, thought for a moment, and then said quietly:

"Ask him into the study, I'll be there in a minute."

"Hullo, Alexander!" he cried, going back to his study. "Haven't seen you for a long time! Every day we kept thinking you would come, and all of a sudden you turn up at night. Why so late? And what's the matter with you? You look awful!"

Alexander, without a word of reply, sank into a chair in a state of collapse. Pyotr Ivanich surveyed him with curiosity.

Alexander heaved a sigh.

"Are you all right?" asked Pyotr Ivanich solicitously.

"Yes, thank you," Alexander replied in feeble accents. "I move, eat, drink, so I must be well."

"It's no joking matter—you ought to see a doctor."

"Lots of people have given me that advice, but no doctors or opodeldoc can help me. My sickness is not physical."

"What's the matter with you? You haven't been gambling or losing money, have you?" asked Pyotr Ivanich eagerly.

"You can't imagine a grief that has nothing to do with money," said Alexander, trying to smile.

"What sort of grief can that be if it isn't worth a brass farthing, like some of your griefs?"

"The sort of grief I am now in. Do you know what my present grief is?"

"Grief? Everything's all right in your home—I know that from the letters to which your mother treats me every month. Nothing can be worse at the office than it already is. You've been passed over for your junior—that's really too bad! You say you're well, you haven't lost money or been gambling... all that's important, one could cope with anything else; next comes a lot of rubbish, love, I suppose."

"Yes, love. But do you know what has happened? When you do, perhaps you won't take it so lightly, but will be horrified."

"Tell me, then. I haven't been horrified for a long time," said his uncle, sitting down. "But it isn't so hard to guess, either. You've probably been fooled or duped."

Alexander jumped up, seemed to be about to speak, but sat down again without a word.

"Aha! So it's true? You see! I told you so, but you said, 'Oh, no, that could never be!'"

"How could I have imagined such a thing?" said Alexander. "After all that—"

"You should not have imagined, you should have foreseen, that is, known—that's more like it—and acted accordingly."

"You can reason so calmly, Uncle, when I...." said Alexander.

"What is it to me?"

"Oh, I forgot. You wouldn't care if the whole town was burned down or sank into the earth."

"Begging your pardon—and what about my factory?"

"You joke, but I am suffering in earnest. I am unhappy, I'm like a sick man."

"And have you really grown so thin from love? Why, that's outrageous! No! You have been ill and now you are beginning to recover, and high time. This folly has been going on for more than eighteen months—that's no joke. A little more and I should have begun to believe in unalterable eternal love."

"Uncle," said Alexander. "Have pity on me! I'm going through hell."

"Well, and what's it all about?"

Alexander drew up his chair to the desk and his uncle started moving the ink-pot, paper-weight and other objects out of his nephew's way.

"Comes here at night," he said to himself. "Going through hell—he's sure to break something or other again."

"I shall find no consolation from you," began Alexander. "Nor do I demand any. I only ask your help, as my uncle, my relative.... I seem silly to you, don't I?"

"Yes, if you weren't so pitiful."

"So you do pity me?"

"Very much. I'm not made of stone, am I? Good chap, clever, well brought-up, and he comes to grief for no earthly reason—and what for? For a lot of rubbish."

"Prove that you pity me."

"How? You say you don't need money."

"Money, money! Oh, if my misfortune were nothing but lack of money I would bless my fate."

"Don't say that," said Pyotr Ivanich gravely. "You're young—you would curse, not bless your fate. I myself have cursed my fate more than once."

"Hear me out patiently."

"Will you be here long, Alexander?" asked his uncle.

"Yes, I need all your attention. Why?"

"Well, you see, I want to have supper. I was going to go to bed without supper, but if we are to sit here long, then let's have supper and drink a bottle of wine, and you can tell me all about it the while."

"And you can eat supper?" exclaimed Alexander in astonishment.

"I most certainly can. Can't you?"

"I? Have supper? You won't be able to swallow a bite yourself when you hear that this is a matter of life and death."

"Life and death?" repeated his uncle. "Well, of course, that's extremely important, but let's just try—I think we'll manage to swallow a bite."



He rang the bell.

"Ask what there is for supper," he said to the servant who answered his summons. "And tell them to get out a bottle of Lafitte, with the green seal."

The servant retired.

"Uncle! You're not in the right mood to hear the sad tale of my grief," said Alexander, picking up his hat. "I'd better come tomorrow."

"No, no!" said Pyotr Ivanich quickly, seizing his nephew by the hand. "I'm always in the same mood. If you come tomorrow, you'll find me at breakfast, or, still worse, engaged. Better get it over at once. Supper won't spoil anything. I shall listen and understand still better. On an empty stomach, you know, it's not so easy."

Supper was brought in.

"Come on, now, Alexander!" said Pyotr Ivanich.

"I can't eat anything, Uncle," said Alexander impatiently and looked on with a shrug of the shoulders as his uncle busied himself about the supper table.

"At least have a glass of wine—the wine's not bad."

Alexander shook his head.

"Well, take a cigar and tell me, and I'll listen with all my ears," said Pyotr Ivanich, and began eating with relish.

"You know Count Novinsky, don't you?" began Alexander, after a pause.

"Count Platon?"

"Yes."

"He's a friend of mine—well?"

"I congratulate you on having such a scoundrelly friend!"

Pyotr Ivanich suddenly stopped chewing and looked at his nephew in astonishment.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "And do you know him?"

"I know him very well."

"Have you known him long?"

"Three months."

"How's that? I've known him for five years and always considered him a decent man; everyone has a good word for him, ask whom you will, and here you demolish him all of a sudden!"

"How long is it since you began sticking up for people, Uncle? You used always to—"

"I have always stuck up for decent people. And how long is it since you began abusing people, instead of calling them all angels as you used to?"

"That was before I knew them, but now—Oh, human beings, *unhappy race, fit theme for tears and laughter!* I admit that I am utterly to blame for not having listened to you when you advised me to beware of everyone."

"And I still advise you to. There's no harm in being on the alert. If a man turns out a ruffian, you will not have been taken in, and if he turns out to be a decent person, you will be pleasantly disappointed."

"Show me where the decent people are," said Alexander scornfully.

"Well, there's you and me—aren't we decent people? The count, since you mention him, is a decent man, too. And there are plenty more. Everyone has something bad about him. But not everyone is altogether bad."

"Everyone, everyone!" said Alexander firmly.

"What about yourself?"

"Me? I at least take from the crowd a heart which, though broken, is free of baseness, a tortured soul, but one that cannot be reproached with falseness, hypocrisy, treachery, I am not infected—"

"Well, we'll see. But what has the count done to you?"

"What has he done? He has stolen my all."

"Speak more plainly. The word *all* may cover God knows what—money perhaps. He wouldn't do that."

"That which is dearer to me than all the treasures in the world," said Alexander.

"And what may that be?"

"All—happiness, life!"

"But you're alive."

"Unfortunately I am. But such a life is worse than death."

"Tell me straight out what has happened."

"Something awful," said Alexander. "God, oh God!"

"Aha! I suppose he's won your beauty away from you, that ... what's her name? Yes, he's a dab at that. You'll find it hard to compete with him. The dog!" said Pyotr Ivanich, popping a morsel of turkey into his mouth.

"He shall pay dear for his skill," said Alexander, flushing up. "I will not yield without a fight. Death shall determine which of us is to possess Nadya. I will crush this cheap ladies' man. He shall not live, shall not enjoy his stolen treasure. I will sweep him from the face of the earth."

Pyotr Ivanich laughed.

"Oh, the provinces!" he said. "*À propos* the count, Alexander—did he say whether he had received any porcelain ware from abroad? He sent for a consignment in the spring. I should like to have a look at it."

"It's not a matter of porcelain ware, Uncle. Didn't you hear what I said?" Alexander interrupted him fiercely.

"M'h'm," grunted his uncle, gnawing at a bone.

"And what have you to say to it?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm listening to you."

"For once in your life listen attentively. I have come to you on a serious matter. I yearn to regain my composure, to find the answers to a million agonizing ques-

tions which are agitating me ... I am at my wit's end.... I don't know what I'm doing—help me!”

“I am quite at your service. Only tell me what you want. I'm even ready with money—so long as it's not for some trifle.”

“Trifle. It is hardly a trifle when perhaps in a few hours' time I shall no longer be alive, or I shall have become a murderer ... and you laugh, you eat your supper calmly.”

“I beg your pardon. You've had supper yourself, I suppose, and you don't want to let me eat.”

“I haven't had a bite for two days.”

“So it really is something important!”

“Tell me one thing—will you do me the greatest favour?”

“What?”

“Will you be my second?”

“The cutlets are quite cold,” said Pyotr Ivanich irately, pushing the dish away from him.

“Uncle, you can joke!”

“I ask you, how can I listen to such nonsense with a straight face? Asking me to be your second!”

“And you won't?”

“Of course I won't!”

“Good. Another will be found, some stranger who will see the deadly injury I have received avenged. I will only ask you to speak to the count, to find out the conditions.”

“I couldn't do that. I couldn't bring myself to suggest such folly to him.”

“Then, farewell,” said Alexander, taking up his hat.

“What—going? Won't you have a glass of wine?”

Alexander made as if to go, but sank into a chair near the door in profound dejection.

"To whom can I go, where can I seek sympathy?" he said softly.

"Listen to me, Alexander," said Pyotr Ivanich, wiping his lips with his napkin, and moving his chair nearer his nephew. "I see I shall really have to talk to you seriously. Let's talk then. You came to me for help. I will help you, but not in the way you imagine, and on condition that you obey me. Don't ask anyone to be your second—no good will come of it. You are making a mountain out of a molehill, the story will get about everywhere, you will become a laughing-stock, or, still worse, you will be insulted. Nobody will come forward, and even if you do manage at last to hit upon some madman, the count will not fight. I know him."

"Not fight! Then there is not a drop of nobility in his nature," said Alexander angrily. "I did not know he was as base as all that."

"He is not base, only wise."

"And in your opinion I am foolish."

"N-no—in love," drawled out Pyotr Ivanich.

"If you intend to point out to me the folly of duelling, Uncle, then I warn you it will be a waste of time. I shall remain firm."

"I do not. It has long been proved that it is foolish, on principle, to fight duels. But people do fight, there are always plenty of fools, and there's no making them see reason. I only want to point out that you, in particular, ought not to fight."

"I should like to see how you're going to convince me of that!"

"Then listen. Tell me—with whom are you more angry—with the count, or with her—what's her name—Anyuta, isn't it?"

"Him I detest, her I despise," said Alexander.

"Let's begin with the count. Say he accepts your challenge, say even that you find some fool of a second—what then? The count will kill you as easily as if you were a fly, and afterwards everyone will laugh at you. A fine revenge! That's not what you want, you know. What you want is to annihilate the count."

"Who knows which of us will kill the other?" said Alexander.

"He's sure to kill you. As far as I know you can't shoot at all. And according to the rules he would have the first shot."

"The decision will lie with Heaven."

"Well, say what you like—Heaven will decide in the count's favour. They say the count can hit the same spot several times running at fifteen paces, and you think he'll miss you on purpose! Even admitting that Heaven allows such awkwardness and injustice, and you chance to kill him—what then? Would that give you back the girl's love? No, she would loathe you, and you would be sent for a soldier. And—most important of all—the next day you would be ready to tear your hair with remorse, and be perfectly indifferent to your beloved."

Alexander shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

"Since you know all about it, Uncle," he said, "tell me what I am to do in my position."

"Nothing. Leave things as they are. Everything's spoilt anyhow."

"Leave my happiness in his hands, leave him the proud possessor! What terrors could deter me! You do not know my torments. You have never loved if you think to restrain me by such cold moralizing. Milk flows in your veins, not blood."

"Stop talking nonsense! As if there weren't any amount of girls like your Marya or Sophia, or whatever she's called."

"Her name is Nadezhda."

"Nadezhda, is it? And which one is Sophia?"

"Sophia is in the country," replied Alexander unwillingly.

"You see," went on his uncle. "Sophia, there, Nadezhda, here, Marya somewhere else. The heart is a very deep well—it takes a long time to get to the bottom of it. It goes on loving till old age."

"No, the heart only loves once."

"You are just repeating what you have heard others say. The heart loves as long as its forces are not all expended. It has a life of its own, and, like the other parts of a human being, has its youth and its age. If one love is unlucky, it merely quietsens down and waits in silence for the next. And if that one does not come off, if the lovers are parted, the power to love remains in abeyance till the third, or the fourth time, until, at last, the heart puts all its force into some one happy encounter, to which there are no obstacles, after which it slowly and gradually cools down. Some people are lucky in love the first time, and these are the ones who exclaim that one only loves once. While a man is not old and has his health—"

"You are always talking about youth, Uncle, about physical love."

"I speak about youth because senile love is an error, a freak. And what is physical love? There is no such thing, or it is not love, just as there is no such thing as purely ideal love. In love, body and soul take equal parts. Otherwise love is not complete. We are neither spirits nor beasts. You say yourself, 'milk runs in the



veins, not blood.' So you see, on the one hand, we have blood in the veins—that's physical, and on the other, vanity, habit, that's spiritual. And there's love for you! What was I saying—oh, yes—you'll be sent for a soldier. Besides, after all this fuss your young lady won't let you go near her. You would simply have injured her and yourself—can't you see that? I trust this side of the question has been sufficiently investigated. Now—"

Pyotr Ivanich poured himself out some wine and drank. "That blockhead!" he said. "The Lafitte's cold."

Alexander fell silent, his head bowed.

"Now tell me," went on his uncle, warming the glass of wine between the palms of his hands. "What makes you wish to sweep the count from the face of the earth?"

"I told you what. Has he not destroyed my happiness? He came bursting in, like a wild beast—"

"Into the fold," interrupted his uncle.

"—And stole everything," continued Alexander.

"He did not steal, he just came and took what he wanted. Was he bound to find out whether your beautiful maiden was free? I cannot understand the folly which, I admit, most lovers have perpetrated since the beginning of creation till our times—to be angry with rivals. What could be more idiotic—*sweep him from the face of the earth!* What for? Simply because he knows how to make himself liked. As if it were his fault and as if matters would be improved by punishing him. And your—what's her name—Katyenka, isn't it?—did she resist him? Did she make any efforts to avoid the peril? She yielded of her own will, ceased to love you, so what's the good of arguing? The past cannot be brought back. And it would be sheer egoism to insist on your rights. There's some sense in demanding faithfulness from

a *wife*—an undertaking has been given, the well-being of a whole family often depends on this. But even then one cannot demand that she should never love anyone else ... one can only demand that she should ... you know. And didn't you hand her over to the count yourself? Did you try to win her back?"

"That's just what I want to do!" said Alexander, jumping up. "And you want to restrain my noble impulse."

"To win her back with a club in your hand!" his uncle broke in. "We don't live in the Kirghiz steppe. The civilized world knows other weapons. You should have taken it up in time and quite differently, have fought another sort of duel with the count, in the presence of your beloved."

Alexander gazed at his uncle in astonishment.

"What sort of duel?" he asked.

"I'll tell you in a minute. How have you behaved so far?"

With innumerable digressions, presenting all sorts of mitigating circumstances, quibbling, grimacing, Alexander told him the whole story.

"You see? You're to blame all round," declared Pyotr Ivanich, who had been listening to him with an expression of distaste. "How many follies you have committed! Oh, Alexander, what brought you here? Was it worth while coming for this? You could have carried on just the same at home, with your auntie, on the shores of the lake. Oh, how could you be such a baby, making scenes, flying into a rage.... Ugh! Who behaves like this nowadays? What if your—what's her name, Julia?—tells the count everything? But no, there's no danger of that, thank God! She's probably clever enough, when he asked about you, to have told him—"

"Told him what?" asked Alexander quickly.

"That she fooled you, that you are in love with her, that you're a nuisance, bore her.... They always do, you know."

"You think she ... said ... that?" asked Alexander, turning pale.

"Undoubtedly. Surely you don't imagine she would tell him how you culled yellow blossoms in the garden together? What a simpleton you are!"

"But what sort of duel should I have fought with the count?" asked Alexander impatiently.

"I'll tell you. You should not have been rude to him, or avoided him and made faces at him, on the contrary, you should have replied to his courtesies by being twice as courteous, three times, ten times.... And you shouldn't have irritated your, what's her name, Nadya (got it right, this time, didn't I?) with reproaches, you should have yielded to her whims, pretended to have noticed nothing, to have no suspicions whatever, to consider such a thing as deception an impossibility. You should not have let them become so intimate, you should have cleverly interfered with their tête-à-têtes, as if by chance, have gone everywhere with them, even when they went for rides, and, skilfully, quite casually, have thrown down the gauntlet to your rival in her presence, rallying all the forces of your mind, forming a regular battery of wit and cunning, and then, you know—exposing and striking at your rival's weak spot without appearing to mean anything, good-naturedly, even reluctantly, gradually stripping him of the trappings a young man dons to show off before a pretty girl. You should have noticed what it was that impressed and dazzled her in him most of all, and then attacked these very points, belittling them, making them appear commonplace, indicating that the new hero was

nothing special, and was only showing off in front of her. And all this should have been done with coolness, patience, ability—that is the true duel in our age. But you are not capable of it.”

With this Pyotr Ivanich drained his glass and immediately poured himself out another.

“Contemptible cunning! To try to win a woman’s heart by ruses,” said Alexander indignantly.

“And is it better to try with a club? It may be possible by wiles to retain someone’s affection—but I don’t think it can be done by force. I can understand the desire to get rid of a rival. It is quite natural to make efforts to keep a woman one loves, to anticipate or prevent danger. But to beat him because he has inspired affection would be equivalent to hitting the object you have bruised yourself against, as children do. Say what you like, but the count has done nothing wrong. As far as I can see you know nothing about the mysteries of love and that is why your love affairs and your novels are so bad.”

“Love affairs,” exclaimed Alexander, tossing his head contemptuously. “And can there be anything pleasing or enduring about love inspired by cunning?”

“I don’t know whether it’s pleasing, it depends on how you feel, I don’t care about that. As you know, I have not very high opinion of love. I could live quite well without it. But that it is more enduring—that’s true enough. You must use finesse in handling the heart. It’s a delicate instrument—if you don’t know what stops to touch in it, it may come out with God knows what music. Inspire love however you like, but retain it by using your mind. Cunning is a function of the mind, and there is nothing despicable in it. You should not humiliate your rival or try to slander him—by this

means you put your lady against you. All you have to do is to strip him of the trappings with which he dazzles your lady-love, to show him to her as just an ordinary man and no hero.... It seems to me legitimate to defend one's property with noble artifices. These are not despised in warfare. You wanted to get married—a fine husband you'd be, making your wife scenes and shaking a club in your rival's face—you'd simply be a fool."

Pyotr Ivanich tapped his forehead with his finger.

"Your Varenka was a hundred times cleverer than you when she suggested waiting a year."

"But could I have used cunning, even if I knew how to? For that, one must not love as I do. There are people who can pretend to cool off now and then, who stay away on purpose for several days—and that works. But I cannot do this! To pretend and calculate, when the very sight of her takes my breath away and makes my knees shake, when I am ready to undergo any tortures just for the sake of seeing her. No, you can say what you like but there is more ecstasy for me in loving with all the force of my soul, even though it means to suffer, than in being loved without loving myself, or in half-loving as an amusement, according to some ignoble system, playing with a woman as if she were a lap-dog, and then rejecting her."

Pyotr Ivanich shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, then, suffer, if it gives you pleasure," he said. "Oh, the provinces! Oh, Asia! You ought to live in the East. They still tell women whom to love there, and if they disobey, drown them. But here," he continued, as if talking to himself, "if you want to be happy with a woman, not in your way, like a madman, but rationally, a great deal is needed. You must know how

to transform a girl into a woman by laying down a thought-out plan, methodically. If you want her to understand and fulfil her vocation, you must surround her with a magic circle, not too narrow, so that she does not notice or overstep the limits, you must skilfully take possession not only of her heart—that's nothing, it's an uncertain, not lasting possession—but of her mind, her will, subordinate her tastes and morals to your own, so that she sees through your eyes, thinks with your mind—"

"In other words, make her a doll or a submissive slave to her husband," interrupted Alexander.

"Why? So act that neither her feminine nature nor her qualities change. Leave her freedom of action in her own sphere, but see that your searching mind follows her movements, her sighs, her acts, that every stirring of agitation, every impulse, every vestige of emotion always and everywhere meets the outwardly indifferent, but ever vigilant eye of the husband. Let there be permanent control without the slightest tyranny. Skilfully, unnoticed by her, lead her along the desired path. Oh, a wise and painful discipline is required—the discipline of a wise, experienced man—that's just it."

He coughed meaningly and gulped down his wine.

"Then," he continued, "the husband can sleep peacefully even when his wife is not at his side, or sit care-free in his study when she sleeps."

"Aha! So that's the famous secret of conjugal happiness!" said Alexander. "To fasten to oneself by guile the mind, heart and will of a woman, and to rejoice in this, to glory in it—this is happiness! And supposing she notices?"

"Why glory in it?" asked his uncle. "That is not required."



"Judging by the fact that you are sitting carefree in your study, Uncle," said Alexander, "while my aunt sleeps, I conclude that this man—"

"Sh! Be quiet," said his uncle, with a wave of his hand. "It's a good thing my wife's asleep, or, you know—"

Just then the door of the study opened softly, but no one appeared.

"And the wife," said a woman's voice from the hall, "should never show that she understands her husband's magnificent discipline, but should have her own little system, and not chatter about it over a bottle of wine."

The two Aduyevs rushed to the door, but rapid footsteps and the rustle of skirts were heard in the hall — and then all was still.

Uncle and nephew looked at one another.

"Well, Uncle?" said the nephew, after a pause.

"Well? Never mind!" said Pyotr Ivanich, knitting his brows. "I shouldn't have boasted. Learn, Alexander, and do not marry, or if you do, marry a fool. You'll never manage a clever woman. It takes subtlety."

He thought for a time and suddenly smote his brow.

"Why didn't I guess she would know about your late call?" he said in vexation. "And that a woman never sleeps when there's a secret between two men in the next room, that she's sure either to send her maid or come herself? Idiiotic not to have foreseen, it's all you and that accursed Lafitte! Giving myself away! Such a lesson from a woman of twenty!"

"Are you afraid, Uncle?"

"Afraid? Not a bit. I've made a mistake—I mustn't lose my head, I must find a way out."

He once more fell to thinking.

"She was boasting," he said after a pause. "What kind of system can she have? She can't have any system!"



She's too young. She only said so because she was annoyed. But she's caught sight of the magic circle now, and she'll become wily too. Oh, I know what a woman's nature is! But we'll see."

He smiled triumphantly, and the wrinkles on his forehead disappeared.

"I shall have to go about things differently," he said. "The former method won't do. Now I shall have to —"

He broke off suddenly, glancing anxiously towards the door.

"Well, all that's to come," he said. "Now let's take up your affairs, Alexander. What were we talking about? Oh, yes, you said you wanted to kill your ... what's her name?"

"I despise her too deeply for that," said Alexander, sighing heavily.

"You see? You're already half-cured. But is it true? I think you're still angry. Well, never mind, go on despising her—it's the best thing you can do in your present situation. I was going to suggest something, but I won't."

"Oh do, for God's sake, do!" said Alexander. "There isn't a spark of reason left in me. I suffer, I perish ... lend me some of your cold reason. Say anything that may ease and soothe my wounded heart!"

"If I do, you'll rush back to her again."

"What an idea! After that—"

"People go back after worse things. Do you give me your word of honour you won't?"

"I'll swear to it if you like."

"No, your word of honour—that'll be safer."

"My word of honour."

"Very well, then—we have decided that the count is not to blame."

"Well, and what then?"

"Well, and what has your ... what's her name, done?"

"Nadya?" cried Alexander in astonishment. "Nadya has done nothing?"

"Of course not! What has she done? —tell me that! You have no reason to despise her."

"She has done nothing? No, Uncle, that's going a little too far. Say, the count ... after all ... he didn't know ... although even then—But she? Then who is to blame? Am I?"

"That's more like it. But in fact no one is to blame. Tell me what you despise her for."

"For a base act."

"What did it consist in?"

"In repaying lofty, boundless passion with ingratitude."

"What's there to be grateful for? Was it for her sake, to please her, that you fell in love? You wanted to do her a service, did you? In that case you would have done better to fall in love with her *mamma*."

Alexander looked at him and could find nothing to say.

"You should not have let her see the whole force of your feelings. Women grow cool when men tell them all. You should have studied her disposition and acted accordingly, not have lain at her feet like a lap-dog. How can one ignore the character of a partner with whom one has business? You ought to have discovered at the start that nothing more was to be expected of her. She played out her romance with you to the end and she'll do just the same with the count and, perhaps, with someone else. Nothing more is to be expected of her. This is the limit of her abilities. It is not in her. And you imagined God knows what."

"Why did she love another?" interrupted Alexander sadly.

"So that's what she's done! A clever question! Oh, you savage! And why did you fall in love with her? Come on now, fall out of love this minute!"

"Does it depend on myself?"

"And did it depend on her to fall in love with the count? You say impulses should never be suppressed, but when it affects yourself, you immediately ask, 'Why did she love another?' 'Why did this one die, that one go out of his mind?' How can such questions be answered? Love has to come to an end some time or other—it can't go on for ever."

"It can, it can! I feel the strength of my own heart—I would have loved with an eternal love!"

"Yes, and if anyone were to love you in real earnest, you'd take to your heels! You're all like that—I know you!"

"Even if her love came to an end," said Alexander, "why did it have to be like that?"

"What does it matter how? You were loved, you were happy—and that's all."

"Giving herself to another!" said Alexander, turning pale.

"Would you have had her love another on the sly, while assuring you of her love? Come now! Tell me, what she ought to have done, and in what way she has been to blame!"

"Oh, I'll have my revenge on her!" said Alexander.

"You are ungrateful," pursued Pyotr Ivanich. "That's no good! However a woman treats you, whether she deceives you, cools to you, behaves, as the poets say, with guile—you may blame nature, indulge, if you will, in philosophical meditations, execrate the world, life, whatever you like, but never, by word or deed, hurt

a woman! The only weapon to be used against a woman is indulgence, at the worst—forgetfulness. A decent man will not permit himself any other. Remember how you bored everyone with your happiness a year and a half ago, how you didn't know what to do with yourself for joy! Eighteen months of uninterrupted happiness. Say what you like, you are ungrateful!"

"Oh, Uncle, there was nothing in the world so sacred to me as love! Without love, life is not life!"

"Oh," interrupted Pyotr Ivanich irately. "You make me sick."

"I would have worshipped Nadenka," went on Alexander. "I would not have envied the happiness of anyone in the world. I dreamed of spending my whole life with Nadenka—and now.... Where is the vast, noble passion of which I dreamed? It has been turned into a silly Lilliputian comedy of sighs, scenes, jealousy, lies, hypocrisy. Oh, God, oh, God!"

"Why did you imagine things that do not exist? Didn't I tell you that all this time you wanted to lead an imaginary life? According to you, a man's only occupation is to be a lover, a husband, a father—you will hear of nothing else. But as well as all this a man is a citizen, he has a position in society, work to do—whether he be a writer, a landed proprietor, a soldier, an official, an industrialist ... and with you all this is overshadowed by love and friendship ... what an Arcadia you live in! You've crammed yourself with novels, listened to your auntie in the country, and brought all these theories here. And now you've invented—'noble passion.'"

"Yes, noble!"

"Enough, I beg you! Are there really any noble passions?"

"What?"

"Well—are there? Does not passion mean that some feeling or enthusiasm, or affection or that sort of thing has reached a point when the reason no longer works? And where's the nobility in that, I ask you? There is nothing human in mere madness. And why do you only look on one side of the medal? I am now speaking of love. Look on the other side and you will see that love is not a bad thing. Remember the happy moments when you almost deafened me—"

"Oh, don't remind me, don't remind me!" said Alexander, waving his hands frantically. "It's all very well for you to reason like this, you are sure of the woman you love! I should like to see what you would do in my place!"

"Me? I would seek distraction—at the works. Come with me tomorrow."

"You and I will never agree," said Alexander sadly. "Your view of life does not console me, it repels me. I am sad, there is a chill at my heart. Up till now love saved me from that chill. Now love has gone, and there is grief in my heart. I am afraid, miserable..."

"Occupy yourself with work."

"All that's true, Uncle. You and your like can reason thus. You are cold by nature, your soul is incapable of emotion...."

"And you fancy you have a mighty soul! Yesterday in the seventh heaven, and cast down at the least little thing.... You can't stand any suffering."

"Steam, steam," said Alexander faintly, scarcely able to defend himself. "You think and feel and speak exactly like an engine rolling over the rails—smoothly, evenly, calmly."

"Well, and that's not so bad. Better than going off the tracks, bumping into a rut, as you have just done,

and being unable to get up again. Steam, steam! Why steam, look you, is an honour to humanity! In this invention lies the principle which makes human beings of you and me. Even animals can die of grief. There have been cases of dogs dying on the grave of their masters, or falling dead from joy after a long separation. What's the virtue in that? And you considered yourself an exceptional being of a higher order, an extraordinary person—"

Pyotr Ivanich glanced at his nephew and suddenly broke off.

"What? Surely you're not crying?" he said and his face darkened, that is to say, he went red.

Alexander said nothing. His uncle's last arguments had quite cut the ground from beneath his feet. But while he had nothing with which to oppose them, he was still swayed by his present feelings. He remembered his lost happiness, and that now another—And tears streamed freely down his cheeks.

"Tchk, tchk, tchk! You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Pyotr Ivanich. "And you a man! For God's sake, go somewhere else and cry!"

"Uncle! Remember the years of your youth!" sobbed Alexander. "Did you really endure the most bitter insult which fate can deal to a human being, calmly and coolly? To have lived a year and a half such a full life, and suddenly—all gone! Nothing left! After all that sincerity—cunning, secrecy, coldness and towards me! Oh God, could there be any greater torment! It's easy enough to say of another—you have been deceived. But to feel this? How she changed! How she began dressing herself up for the count! Sometimes when I came she would turn pale, could hardly speak, lied—Oh, no, no...."

Here his tears flowed more violently than ever.

"If I could console myself," he continued, "by the thought that I had lost her owing to circumstances, that she had acted under compulsion ... that she had died—even *that* would be easier to bear ... but no, no ... another! It's appalling, intolerable! And no way of getting her from the thief! You have deprived me of my weapons. What am I to do? Teach me! I am choking, I am in pain ... misery, anguish! I shall die, I shall shoot myself!"

He leaned his elbow on his desk, put his head in his hands, and sobbed loudly.

Pyotr Ivanich was completely taken aback. He walked up and down the room once or twice, then stopped in front of Alexander and stood there, scratching the back of his head, not knowing what to do.

"Have some wine, Alexander," he said as tenderly as he knew how, "Perhaps it'll—"

The only sign that Alexander had heard him was a violent convulsion of his head and shoulders, and he went on sobbing. Pyotr Ivanich frowned, waved his hand in a gesture of despair and went out of the room.

"What am I to do with Alexander?" he said to his wife. "He's sitting there bawling, I can't stay in the room! He's simply worn me out!"

"And you went away and left him?" she asked. "Poor boy! I'll go to him."

"There's nothing you can do—it's his nature. Just like his aunt—she was just such a cry-baby. I kept on arguing with him."

"Is that all you did?"

"And I convinced him. He agreed with me."

"No doubt you did! You're very clever and ... cunning," she added.



"And thank God for that! It's all that's required, I should think."

"That's what you think, but he's crying."

"It's not my fault, I did everything I could to comfort him."

"What did you do?"

"A great deal. I talked for an hour on end—my throat's positively dry. All about the theory of love—I expounded it all to him, I offered him money ... supper ... I tried to get him to take some wine—"

"And he went on crying?"

"Simply bawling! It got worse and worse."

"Amazing! Let me go to him! I'll see what I can do, and in the meantime you can think out your new method."

"What's that?"

But she had slipped out of the room like a shadow.

Alexander was still sitting there with his head in his hands. Someone touched him on the shoulder. He raised his head. Before him stood a young and beautiful woman in a dressing-gown and a cap *à la finnoise*....

"*Ma tante!*" he exclaimed.

She sat beside him, gazed at him steadily as only women know how to gaze, then gently wiped his eyes with her handkerchief and kissed his forehead. He pressed his lips to her hand. They talked long.

An hour later he went out, thoughtful but smiling, and slept peacefully for the first time after many sleepless nights. She went back to her room with red eyes. Pyotr Ivanich had long been snoring.



## PART TWO





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## I



about a year has passed since the scenes and events described in the last chapter.

Alexander gradually progressed from gloomy despair to cold dejection. He no longer heaped curses, with the appropriate grinding of the teeth, upon the count and Nadenka, but merely branded them with the mark of his profound contempt.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna consoled him with all the tenderness of a friend and a sister. He surrendered himself willingly to the sweet guardianship. Such natures as his love to place their will at the disposal of another. They cannot get on without a nursemaid.

At last his passion died down, his true grief passed, but he could not bear to part with it. He kept it up by force, or rather, he created for himself an artificial grief, played with it, arrayed himself in it, plunged into it.

He had become fond of a martyr's role. He was quiet, dignified, abstracted, as behove a man who had, as he put it, received a *blow from the hand of fate*. He spoke of elevated sufferings, of sacred, lofty feelings crushed and trampled in the mud—and by whom? "By a mere girl," he would add, "a heartless coquette, and by a contemptible *debauché*, a pseudo-celebrity! Can it be

that fate has sent me into the world in order that all that is highest in me should be sacrificed to a nonentity?"

Such affectation would not have been pardoned in a man by another man, or in a woman by another woman—and the affected one would have swiftly been brought down to earth—but what is there that the young of opposite sexes will not pardon in one another?

Lizaveta Alexandrovna listened indulgently to his jeremiads and consoled him as best she could. They by no means disgusted her, perhaps partly because she found in her nephew a kind of fellow-feeling, heard, beneath his amorous complaints, a voice not quite alien to her own sufferings.

She listened eagerly to the groans of his heart and responded to them with scarcely discernible sighs of her own and tears which no one saw. She even found comforting words to say, attuning them to her nephew's sentimental, affected rantings. But Alexander would not hear of consolation.

"Don't tell me, *ma tante!*" he protested. "I do not wish to disgrace the sacred name of love by giving that name to my relations with that—" Here he made a scornful grimace and was ready, like Pyotr Ivanich, to say—"what's her name?"

"And yet," he said, with ever-deepening scorn, "she is to be forgiven! I was too much above both her and the count and all that wretched, trivial set. No wonder I remained an enigma to her!"

And after these words the scornful expression stayed for a long time on his countenance.

"My uncle says I ought to be grateful to Nadenka," he continued. "For what? What was the mark of that love? Nothing but vulgarity, nothing but commonplaces! Was there ever the slightest sign of anything rising

above the ordinary sphere of daily cares? Was the slightest heroism or self-sacrifice to be seen in this love? No, it almost all went on with the mother's authority. Did she ever deviate from the laws of society, of duty by so much as an inch? Never! And this is love! A young girl, and unable to infuse poetry into this feeling!"

"What sort of love would you demand from a woman?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"Oh!" replied Alexander. "I would demand the first place in her heart! A beloved woman should not notice, should scarcely see other men; they should all—all but me—appear intolerable to her. I should be higher, handsomer"—here he drew himself up—"better, nobler than all. Every moment not spent with me should be for her a lost moment. In my eyes, in my conversation she should find her happiness, and know no other."

Lizaveta Alexandrovna tried to conceal a smile. Alexander did not notice this.

"She should be ready to sacrifice all contemptible advantages, all calculations, for me," he went on with shining eyes. "She should throw off the despotic yoke of mother or husband, fly, if necessary, to the ends of the world, bear cheerfully all deprivations, scornfully laugh at death itself—that is love! And that—"

"And how would you reward her for that love?" asked his aunt.

"I?" said Alexander, lifting his eyes to heaven. "Oh, I would devote my whole life to her, I would lie at her feet! To look into her eyes would be the highest bliss for me! Her every word would be law for me. I would sing her beauty, our love, nature,

*She would inspire my tongue to speak  
The language of Petrarch and love.*



"But haven't I shown Nadenka how I can love?"

"So you don't believe in love if it is not expressed exactly as you would like? Strong feelings hide themselves, you know."

"Do you seek to convince me, *ma tante*, that feelings like my uncle's, for instance, hide themselves?"

Lizaveta Alexandrovna suddenly blushed. She could not help inwardly agreeing with her nephew that there is something suspicious about feelings which do not show themselves at all, that perhaps they do not exist, that if they did they would come to the surface, that there should be an inexplicable charm in the very atmosphere of love.

Here she mentally passed in review the whole period of her married life and became lost in thought. Her nephew's indiscreet hint had stirred a secret in the depths of her heart which she had buried very deep, and confronted her with the question: was she happy?

She had no right to complain. All the outward conditions of happiness as striven for by the crowd, were hers, like items in a programme. Sufficiency, even luxury in the present, assurance of their continuance in the future—everything to free her from the trivial carking cares which sap the hearts and wither the bosoms of so many poor souls.

Her husband had always worked indefatigably, and still did so. But what was the principal aim of his labours? Was he working for a common human aim, fulfilling the task set him by life, or merely for sordid aims, just to attain importance, in the eyes of men, of official and financial status, to avoid the yoke of need, the pressure of circumstance? God alone knew! He did not like talking about high aims—that he called ranting; and he always said, with arid simplicity, that we must attend to our own business.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna reached the sad conclusion that she herself, and his love for her, were not the only aims of his strivings and efforts. He had worked before his marriage, before meeting his wife. He never spoke to her of love, or asked her about hers. He turned off her questions in this respect with a jest, a witicism, or by affecting drowsiness. He had begun to speak of their wedding very soon after meeting her, as if implying that love was to be taken for granted, that there was no need to talk about it.

He was the foe of all cheap effect, which was all very well of course, but then he did not care for sincere manifestations of feeling either, and did not believe that others might feel a need for them. And though he could have inspired her with deep passion by a single glance or word, he held his peace, he did not want this. It did not even flatter his vanity.

She had tried arousing his jealousy, thinking that then his love would be bound to show itself. But nothing of the sort occurred. The moment he observed that she seemed to like some young man in society, he hastened to invite him to the house, showered him with attentions, could not praise him enough, and never seemed to be afraid to leave him alone with his wife.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna sometimes deceived herself, imagining that Pyotr Ivanich was perhaps exercising strategy, that this was the secret of his mysterious system—always to keep her in a state of uncertainty, thus keeping her love alive. But her husband's very next discussion of love brought her disillusionment.

If he had ever been rude, rough, callous, slow-witted, one of those husbands whose name is legion, whom it is so innocent, so necessary, so delightful to deceive, for their good and one's own, who seem to have been

created in order that a woman should look around for someone who is their direct opposite, things might have been different. Then, perhaps, she would have acted as the majority of women in such cases act. But Pyotr Ivanich was a man with brains and tact such as are seldom met with. He was subtle, penetrating, skilful. He understood all the stirrings of the heart, all the spiritual tempests, but he only *understood* them, nothing more. The whole code of love was in his mind—not in his heart. In all his arguments it was clear that he was speaking of what he had heard and knew, but not of what he felt. He argued truly of passions, but would not acknowledge their power over himself, even laughed at them, considering them misguided, distorted flights from reality, something like illnesses, for the cure of which, in time, remedies will be discovered.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna felt his mental superiority to all around him, and this tortured her. "If only he weren't so clever," she thought. "I would be saved....". He bowed to worthy aims, that was clear, and required of his wife that she also should not lead a life of dreaming.

"But, my God," thought Lizaveta Alexandrovna, "did he really only marry to have a housekeeper, to give his house the completeness and dignity of a domestic hearth, to have more weight in society? A housekeeper, a wife in the crudest sense of the word. Could not he, with his mind, see that even in the most worthy aims it is love that counts for women? Family obligations—these are her cares. But can they be fulfilled without love? Even nurses and foster-mothers make idols out of their charges—and a wife, a mother! Oh, I am ready to purchase feeling at the price of torment, I am ready to bear all the sufferings inseparable from passion, if on-

ly I can live a full life, feel with my whole being, not merely vegetate!"

She glanced at the luxurious furniture, the expensive bibelots scattered about her boudoir—and all this comfort, with which it should be the solicitous hand of a lover that surrounds the beloved woman, seemed to her a cold mockery of true happiness. She was the witness of two extremes—in the nephew and in the uncle. One was ecstatic almost to madness, the other, cold almost to hardness.

"How little either of them, indeed the majority of men, understands true feeling! And how I understand it!" she thought. "And what's the good of anything? What's it all for? Oh, if only—"

She closed her eyes and rested thus a few minutes, then opened them, looked round, sighed heavily, and once more assumed her usual tranquil aspect. Poor woman! Nobody knew of all this, nobody saw it. These unseen, intangible, nameless sufferings, without wounds, bloodshed, screened from sight not by rags, but by velvet garments, might have been counted a sin in her. But she concealed her sorrow with heroic self-sacrifice, and even found strength in herself to console others.

Alexander soon ceased speaking of lofty sufferings and misunderstood, unwanted love. He proceeded to a more common theme. He complained of the tedium of life, of emptiness in his heart, of weary grief.

*I have outlived my sufferings...*  
*Wearied of my dreams....*

"And now I am pursued by a black demon. It accompanies me everywhere, *ma tante*—at night, during a friendly chat, while sipping from the convivial goblet, and in the moment of profoundest thought."

Several weeks passed in this manner. Another fortnight, and it seemed as if the queer fellow would recover completely and perhaps become quite a decent, that is, simple and ordinary person, like everyone else. But no! The peculiarities of his strange disposition found occasion to show themselves in everything.

One day he came to his aunt in a fit of disgust with the entire human race. Every word was a dagger, every argument an epigram directed against those whom he should have respected. No one was spared. Lizaveta Alexandrovna and Pyotr Ivanich came in for their share. She tried to discover the cause.

"You want to know," he began softly, solemnly, "what is agitating, infuriating me? Then listen! As you know, I had a friend whom I have not seen for several years, but for whom I have always kept a warm place in my heart. My uncle, when I first came here, made me write him a strange letter, expounding his favourite rules and way of thinking. But I tore it up and sent another, so it could not have been this which has made my friend change. After this letter, our correspondence ceased and I lost sight of my friend. And now what do you think has happened? Three days ago as I was walking along Nevsky Prospekt, I suddenly came across him. I was stunned, my veins seemed to run fire. Tears came into my eyes. I held out my hands to him, too happy to say a single word, I could hardly breathe. He took one of my hands and pressed it. 'How d'you do, Aduyev,' he said, as if we had only parted the day before. 'Have you been here long?' He was surprised that we had never met before, asked me carelessly what I was doing, where I worked, saw fit to inform me that he had a splendid post, that he was satisfied with his work, his chiefs and his colleagues, and ... with everybody and his own

fate ... then he said he had no time, he was hurrying off to a dinner—d'you hear me, *ma tante*? He meets a friend after a long separation, and cannot put off a dinner."

"But perhaps they were waiting for him," remarked his aunt. "Etiquette would not allow—"

"Etiquette and friendship! You too, *ma tante*, but never mind that—I will tell you something still better! He thrust a paper with his address on it into my hand, saying he would expect me the next evening—and vanished. I looked after him, and it was a long time before I could recover my equanimity. My childhood companion, the friend of my youth! But I told myself he might have meant to put off everything till the evening and then to devote the time to frank, cordial talk. 'So be it,' I thought. 'I'll go.' I went. He had nine or ten visitors. He stretched out his hand to me more cordially than the day before, it is true, but immediately invited me, without a word, to sit down to a game of cards. I said I didn't play, and sat down alone on a sofa, supposing he would leave the game and come to me. 'You don't play?' he said in astonishment. 'Then what do you do?' What a question! Well, I waited an hour, two hours, and he never came near me. I lost my patience. He offered me first a cigar, then a pipe, regretted that I did not play, that I was bored, tried to amuse me—and how do you think? By constantly turning to me and telling me how he was getting on in the game! At last, unable to stand it any longer, I went up to him and asked him if he intended to spare any time for me that evening. My feelings were overwrought, and my voice trembled. This seemed to surprise him. He looked at me strangely. 'All right,' he said. 'Just let me finish the rubber.' At this I seized my hat and made as if to go, but he noticed and stopped me. 'The rubber will soon be over,'



he said. 'We'll have supper in a minute.' At last they finished. He sat down beside me, yawning. And that is how our friendly talk began. 'Did you want to tell me anything?' he asked. It was said in such a dull, unfeeling voice that I only looked at him with a mournful smile and said nothing. Then he suddenly became animated and showered me with questions, 'What's the matter with you?' 'Are you in want of anything?' 'Can I help you in the way of work?' and so on. I shook my head and told him it was not about work that I wanted to talk to him, not about material advantages, but about something nearer to my heart: the golden days of childhood, our games, our pranks.... And fancy—he didn't even let me finish speaking! 'The same old dreamer!' he said, and suddenly changed the subject, as if he considered all this mere trifles, and began gravely asking me about my affairs, my hopes for the future, my career—just like my uncle! I was astonished, I could not believe anyone's heart could have become so hard. I made one last attempt, dwelt on his question about my affairs, and began telling him how I had been treated. 'Only listen to what *people* have done to me,' I began. 'What?' he interrupted me in alarm. 'D'you mean to say you've been robbed?' He thought I was talking about my servants!\* He's like my uncle, he recognizes no other grief. To think that a man should become so callous. 'Yes,' I said, 'people have robbed my soul.' Then I began telling him about my love, my torments, the emptiness in my soul. I warmed up as I spoke, and it seemed to me that the tale of my sorrows would melt ice, that his eyes would be wet with tears. And he sud-

\* Servants used to be referred to as "people" in pre-revolutionary Russia.— *Tr.*



denly burst out laughing. I saw he was holding his handkerchief in his hand; while I was relating my story, he had kept trying to restrain himself, but he could keep it up no longer. I broke off, horror-struck.

"'Enough, enough,' he said. 'Have a drink of vodka and we'll have supper. Waiter—vodka! Come on, come on ... ha-ha-ha.... There's some excellent roast ... roastbeef....'

"He took my arm but I tore it away and fled from this monster. That's what people are like, *ma tante*," concluded Alexander, and departed with a desperate gesture.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna felt sorry for Alexander. She pitied his ardent, but misguided heart. She saw that with another sort of upbringing and correct views of life he could have been happy himself and made another happy. But now he was the victim of his own blindness and the anguished errors of his heart. He made life a torture for himself. How could she show his heart the right path? Where was the compass to set him right? She felt that only a gentle, friendly hand could tend this blossom.

She had once been able to tone down the restless impulses of her nephew's heart, but that had been in regard to love. She had known then how to treat an injured heart. Like a skilful diplomat she had first criticized Nadenka with all her might, holding up her act in the worst possible light, injuring her in Alexander's eyes, and then managed to prove to him that she was not worthy of his love. In this way she had removed from his heart the excruciating pain, substituting for it a tranquil, if not quite just, emotion of scorn. Pyotr Ivanich had on the contrary endeavoured to justify Nadenka and had thus not merely failed to console Alex-

ander but had rubbed salt in his wounds, by forcing him to admit that he had been passed over for a man in every way worthier of love than himself.

But friendship was another matter. Lizaveta Alexandrovna could see that Alexander's friend was wrong in the eyes of Alexander, and right in the eyes of the crowd. But try and prove that to Alexander! She could not bring herself to do this, so she went to her husband for advice, supposing, not without reason, that he would find plenty of arguments against friendship.

"Pyotr Ivanich," she said ingratiatingly, "I have a request to make to you."

"What is it?"

"Guess!"

"Tell me yourself. You know I never refuse any of your requests. I suppose it's something about the summer cottage in Peterhof. But it's a bit early yet."

"It isn't that," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"What then? You said you were afraid of our horses, and would like quieter ones."

"Not that."

"Then it's about the new furniture."

She shook her head.

"Sorry, then I don't know," said Pyotr Ivanich. "Here you are, better take this lottery ticket and spend it as you like. It's yesterday's draw."

He began feeling for his pocket-book.

"Never mind, don't trouble, put the money back!" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "What I want won't cost you a kopek."

"To refuse money when you're offered it," said Pyotr Ivanich, putting his pocket-book back. "Incomprehensible! What is it that you want, then?"

"Only a little good will...."

"As much as you like."

"You see—Alexander came to see me the other day."

"Oh, I begin to smell trouble!" groaned Pyotr Ivanich. "Well?"

"He's so depressed," went on Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "I'm afraid all this will lead him to...."

"What's the matter now? Disappointed in love again?"

"No, in friendship."

"Friendship? He's going from bad to worse! In friendship—that's interesting! Tell me about it."

"It's like this."

And Lizaveta Alexandrovna told him all she had heard from her nephew. Pyotr Ivanich shrugged his shoulders.

"And what do you want me to do? You see the kind of fellow he is."

"You could show him sympathy, ask him about his affairs of the heart—"

"No, no! You do that, please!"

"Speak to him—you know, kindly, not the way you always do. Don't laugh at his feelings."

"Would you rather I cried?"

"It would do no harm."

"And what good will it do him?"

"A great deal—and not him alone," remarked Lizaveta Alexandrovna under her breath.

"What's that?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

She said nothing.

"Oh, that Alexander! He's a dead weight on me."

"Why do you say that?"

"And you ask me why? I've been fussing with him six years. Now he cries and must be consoled. Now I have to answer his mother's letters."

"You poor thing—what a burden! What hard work! To get a letter once a month from an old woman which

you throw away without opening, or to have to talk to your own nephew! Why, it distracts you from your whist! Oh, men, men! So long as there's a good dinner, gold seal Lafitte, and a rubber of whist, nothing else matters to you! And if to this be added an opportunity for displaying your importance and wisdom—you are happy."

"Just as you are of an occasion to flirt," remarked Pyotr Ivanich. "To every one his own, my dear! What more is needed?"

"What more? And the heart? That is never spoken of."

"I like that!"

"We are much too superior to bother about trifles like that. We decide human destinies. We only want to know what a man has in his pocket and the lapel of his frock-coat, nothing else interests us. And you would like everyone to be like that. One sensitive being appears among them, capable of loving and making others love him!"

"He certainly showed how he made that, what's her name—Verochka, isn't it?—love him," remarked Pyotr Ivanich.

"And you can compare him with such a person! It's sheer irony of fate! A sensitive tender nature always seems to get linked up with some cold-hearted person. Poor Alexander! His mind is not so highly developed as his heart, and so he is to blame in the eyes of those whose minds outstrip their feelings, who strive to attain everything through reason."

"You will agree, however, that this is the most important thing—otherwise—"

"I don't agree, I shall never agree. It may be the most important thing at your factory, but you forget that human beings have feelings."

"They have five senses," said Pyotr Ivanich. "I learned that with my A.B.C."

"Vexatious! Tragic!" whispered Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"Well, don't be cross! I'll do whatever you say—but tell me how to do it," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"You can give him a little lesson."

"Scold him? Certainly, that's just what I'm good at."

"You and your scoldings! Explain to him, very kindly, what can be demanded and expected from friends nowadays. Tell him his friend is not so much to blame as he thinks. I don't have to teach you. You're so clever—you have so many wives," added Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

Her last words caused Pyotr Ivanich to frown slightly.

"Haven't there been enough sincere effusions?" he said irately. "Whispering, whispering, and still haven't had it all out about friendship and love! Now you want to involve me—"

"It'll be the last time," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"I hope he'll settle down after this."

Pyotr Ivanich shook his head dubiously.

"Has he enough money?" he asked. "Perhaps he hasn't, he's—"

"You think of nothing but money! He would give all his money for one kind word from his friend."

"And he'll do it, one fine day! He gave one of the clerks in his office money once and all for sincere effusions.... There's the door bell ... perhaps it's Alexander. What am I to do? Say it again: scold him, and what else? Give him money?"

"Don't scold him. You'll only make matters worse. I asked you to talk about friendship, the heart, to be kind and sympathetic to him."

Alexander bowed silently, and ate a good dinner in silence, between the courses making pellets of bread-

crumbs, and scowling from beneath his brows at the bottles and decanters. After dinner he picked up his hat.

"Where are you off to?" asked Pyotr Ivanich. "Stay with us a little."

Alexander obeyed in silence. Pyotr Ivanich, after thinking out a way of approaching the matter as tenderly and skilfully as possible, suddenly burst out, in a rapid stream:

"I hear your friend has treated you in rather a dastardly manner, Alexander."

At these unexpected words Alexander jerked back his head as if stung, and cast a glance full of reproach at his aunt. She had not expected such a crude approach to the matter and, after bending over her work for a moment, raised her head and looked at her husband reproachfully. But he was under the dual protection of digestion and drowsiness and so these glances had no effect on him.

Alexander responded with an almost inaudible sigh.

"Really now," went on Pyotr Ivanich, "do you call that a friend? You haven't met for five years and he has become so cold that he does not half strangle his friend with his embraces when you do meet. He invites you to his house, tries to make you play cards, to eat. And then — treacherous man — noticing his friend's sour expression, begins asking him about his affairs, his circumstances, his needs! What contemptible inquisitiveness! And then — crowning baseness — dares to offer his services, help — perhaps even money! No sincere effusions! Appalling, appalling! Show me this monster, bring him to dinner on Friday! What stakes does he play for?"

"I don't know," said Alexander angrily. "Laugh, Uncle! You are right! I alone am to blame. To believe in people, to seek sympathy—in whom? To cast pearls—

before whom? All around is baseness, pusillanimity, pettiness, and I still retained my youthful belief in the good, in valour, in constancy—”

Pyotr Ivanich's head began to nod more and more frequently and regularly.

“Pyotr Ivanich,” whispered Lizaveta Alexandrovna, tugging his coat sleeve. “Are you asleep?”

“Asleep?” said Pyotr Ivanich, waking up. “I heard everything—‘valour, constancy’.... I wasn't asleep.”

“Leave him alone, *ma tante*,” said Alexander. “If he doesn't get a nap he'll have indigestion and God knows what would happen then! Man may be the ruler of the earth, but he is also the slave of his digestion.”

He tried to produce a bitter smile, but only succeeded in making a rueful grimace.

“Tell me what you wanted from your friend!” asked Pyotr Ivanich. “A sacrifice of some sort? Did you want him to fall into a frenzy, or throw himself out of the window? What's your idea of friendship?”

“I no longer demand sacrifices, believe me! Thanks to my experience of human nature I have descended to a miserable theory of friendship, and love. See—I have always carried these lines about, they seemed to me the truest definition of these two feelings as I used to understand them, and as they ought to be, but now I see they are lies, a slander on human beings, that they display a pitiful ignorance of their hearts. People are not capable of such feelings. Away with these perfidious words!”

He took his pocket-book out and extracted from it two tiny slips of paper covered with scribbles.

“What's that?” asked his uncle. “Let me see!”

“It's not worth while,” said Alexander, preparing to tear up the papers.



"Read it, read it!" insisted Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"This is how two of the latest French novelists define true friendship and love, and I used to agree with them, thinking I should meet such persons in my way through life and find in them— Oh, well— "

He made a scornful gesture and began reading.

"To love, not with that false, timid friendship which exists in our gilded salons, that cannot withstand a handful of gold, that fears an ambiguous word, but with that powerful amity that gives blood for blood, that shows itself in the battle and in bloodshed, beneath the thunder of cannon, the howling of the tempest, when friends kiss with powder-blackened lips, put their bleeding arms round one another. And if Pilades is mortally wounded, Orestes, bidding him a manly farewell, puts an end to his sufferings with a thrust of his dagger, swears a terrible oath to avenge his friend and keeps his vow, then dries his tears and calms down."

Pyotr Ivanich's low, even laugh was heard.

"Who are you laughing at, Uncle?" asked Alexander.

"At the writer, if he is not joking, and if he really means it, and then at you if that is really your idea of friendship."

"Is it so very funny?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"Very, very funny! Sorry—it's at once funny and pathetic. But Alexander himself agreed it was, and allowed me to laugh. He said just now that such friendship is all lies and a libel on human beings. This is quite an important step forward."

"It is lies because people are incapable of rising to the understanding of friendship as it ought to be...."

"If people are incapable of it, then it ought not to be," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"But there have been examples."

"They are exceptions, and exceptions are hardly ever any good. 'Bloody embraces, terrible oaths, dagger thrust....'"

And again he burst out laughing.

"Well, read about love, now," he said. "My sleepiness has quite passed."

"If it gives you an occasion to laugh some more—with pleasure," said Alexander, and began reading the following:

"To love means to belong to oneself no longer, to cease living for oneself, to enter into another's being, to concentrate all human feelings—hope, fear, grief, pleasure—on one object. To love means to live in infinity—"

"What rubbish!" interrupted Pyotr Ivanich. "Just a conglomeration of words!"

"No, it's beautiful, I like it," interposed Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "Go on, Alexander!"

"To know no limit to feeling, to devote oneself to one being," continued Alexander. "To live, to think only for this being's happiness, to find greatness in humiliation, enjoyment in sorrow and sorrow in enjoyment, to yield to all sorts of conflicting emotions, in addition to those of love and hate. To love means to live in an ideal world."

At this Pyotr Ivanich shook his head.

"In an ideal world"—continued Alexander—"surpassing in brilliance and majesty all that we know of brilliance and majesty—in this world the sky will appear clearer, nature more luxuriant. Life and time will be divided into two parts—presence and absence, into two seasons—spring and winter. The first part will be equivalent to spring, the second to winter, since however beautiful the flowers, however clear the heavenly azure,

in separation the beauty of the one and the other is darkened. In the whole world we shall see only one being and in that being we shall see the whole Universe.... Finally, to love means to gather every glance from the beloved being, as the Bedouin gathers every drop of dew for the refreshment of his heat-blistered lips. To be swarming with ideas in the absence of the beloved, and in his presence to be unable to express a single one; to vie with one another in making sacrifices.”

“Enough, for God’s sake, enough!” interrupted Pyotr Ivanich. “I have no patience. You said you would tear them up! Do so as quickly as you can—that’s the way!” Pyotr Ivanich actually rose from his chair and began pacing the floor. “Can there really have been a time when people thought and did all that in perfect seriousness?” he said. “Can it be that what they write of knights and shepherdesses was not just idle nonsense? How can anyone want to strike these wretched chords of the human soul, to analyze these feelings so minutely ... love! To attribute so much importance to it!”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Why drift so far away, Uncle,” said Alexander. “I am aware of this force of love in myself, and am proud of it. My unhappiness consists only in the fact that I have never met anyone worthy of this love and as richly endowed with such a force.”

“The power of love,” repeated Pyotr Ivanich. “It’s the same as saying the power of weakness!”

“That’s not in your line, Pyotr Ivanich,” remarked Lizaveta Alexandrovna. “And you won’t admit of the existence of such love in others.”

“And you—do you mean to say you believe in it?” said Pyotr Ivanich, going up to her. “But no, you must be joking! He’s still a child and understands neither

himself nor others, but it would be unpardonable in you. Could you really respect a man if he were to love you like that? Do people really love like that?"

Lizaveta Alexandrovna laid down her work.

"How do they love, then?" she asked softly, taking his hands and drawing him towards her.

Pyotr Ivanich gently released his hands and pointed surreptitiously at Alexander, who was standing at the window with his back to them, every now and then resuming his pacing backwards and forwards.

"Come now!" he said. "As if you didn't know how people love!"

"Love," she echoed pensively and slowly took up her work.

For a quarter of an hour there was silence in the room. Pyotr Ivanich was the first to break it.

"What work are you engaged upon now?" he asked his nephew.

"Me? Nothing."

"That's not much. Well, at least you read, I suppose."

"Yes."

"And what, may I ask?"

"Krylov's *Fables*."

"A good book. But is that all?"

"At present, all. Oh, heavens—what portraits, how true to life!"

"You seem to be angry with the human race. Is it love for that ... what's her name?... that has made you like this?"

"Oh, I've forgotten all that folly! The other day I happened to pass by the places where I was so happy and suffered so, and I was sure the remembrance would make my heart burst."

"Well, and did it burst?"

"I saw the house and the garden and the railings, and my heart did not even throb."

"There you are then—I told you so! What makes you hate people so?"

"What? Their baseness, their shallowness.... My God! When you think of the wickedness going on in a place where nature has been so generous—"

"What's that to you? Do you want to reform people, do you?"

"What is it to me, you ask? Don't I get bespattered with the mud in which others wallow? You know what befell me—after that how can I help detesting, despising people?"

"And what happened to you?"

"In love—deception, in friendship, cold forgetfulness. Besides, it makes one sick to see people, to have to live with them! All their thoughts, words, deeds—all built upon sand! Today they all strive for one aim, hurrying, knocking one another over, committing base acts, flattering, lowering themselves, scheming, and tomorrow they have forgotten all about it and are hot for something else. Today they are in ecstasies over something, tomorrow they vilify it. Today they are ardent, tender, tomorrow—cold. The more you see of it the more terrible and repulsive life seems! And people—"

Pyotr Ivanich, who had sat down in an easy chair, was beginning to doze again.

"Pyotr Ivanich," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, nudging him gently.

"Spleen, spleen! You should do something," said Pyotr Ivanich, rubbing his eyes. "Then you'd stop ranting against people. There's no sense in it. What's wrong with your friends? They're all decent people."

"You can't name a single one who isn't exactly like one of the beasts in Krylov's fables."

"The Khozarovs, for instance."

"A whole family of beasts," broke in Alexander. "One showers me with flattery to my face, can't do too much for me, and behind my back—I know what he says about me! Another will shed tears of sympathy for one's injury today, and the next day will shed tears with the person who injured one. Today he will laugh with one at another, and tomorrow will laugh at one with another. Disgusting!"

"Well, the Lunins?"

"They're a nice lot, too! He's like the ass the nightingale flew away from to the other end of the world. And she looks just like a good-natured fox."

"What have you to say about the Sonins?"

"Nothing good! Sonin is always ready with good advice when a disaster is over, but try to turn to him in need ... then he'll let you go home without supper, as the fox did with the wolf. Remember how servile he was to you when he hoped to get a post through your aid. Well, you should hear what he says about you now."

"And Volochkov—don't you like him, either?"

"A contemptible beast—and bad-tempered to boot." Alexander fairly spat.

"Well, you certainly have pulled everyone to pieces," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"What have I to expect from people?" continued Alexander.

"Everything—friendship, love, rank, money.... Well, complete your gallery with our portraits. What kind of animals are my wife and I?"

Alexander made no reply, but an expression of subtle, scarcely discernible irony crossed his features. He smiled. Neither the irony nor the smile was lost upon Pyotr Ivanich. He glanced at his wife, who lowered her eyes.



"And you yourself—what kind of an animal are you?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"I have never done anyone any harm," declared Alexander in dignified accents. "In my relations with others I have done all. I—I have a soft heart. I opened wide my embraces to others, and what have they done to me?"

"Listen to him—isn't he absurd?" said Pyotr Ivanich, turning to his wife.

"You find everything absurd," said she.

"I have never demanded of people," continued Alexander, "either good deeds, generosity, or sacrifice ... all I demanded was that which I had every right to expect."

"And you consider yourself in the right? You have come scatheless through the fire. Wait a minute, I'll show you up."

Lizaveta Alexandrovna noted the tone of severity in her husband's voice, and was alarmed.

"Pyotr Ivanich," she whispered. "Don't!"

"Let him hear the truth! I won't be long. Be so kind as to tell me, Alexander, when you were trouncing all your acquaintances just now, some as rascals, some as fools, did not your conscience prick you?"

"Why should it, Uncle?"

"Because you have for several years always received a cordial welcome from these animals. I admit that these people have used wiles, have, as you say, schemed, in regard to people they hoped to get something from. But they had nothing to expect from you—what made them invite you, be kind to you? It's not nice, Alexander," added Pyotr Ivanich gravely. "After that another man would hold his tongue, even if he discovered some bad things about them."

Alexander flushed.



"I put their kindness down to your recommendation," he said, but meekly, without any of his former dignity. "And then society manners—"

"Good! Let us take people not in society. I've tried hard to convince you, with what success I don't know, that you have been unjust to your—what's her name?—Sashenka, is it? For a year and a half you were like one of the family in their house. Stayed there from morning till night, and were even loved by that contemptible chit of a girl, as you now call her. One would think all this deserved not contempt."

"Why did she deceive me?"

"You mean, love another? We've had all that, haven't we? Do you really believe that if she had gone on loving you, you would not have got tired of her?"

"I? Never!"

"I see you don't understand a thing. We will go on. You say you have no friends, and I thought you had three."

"Three!" exclaimed Alexander. "There was one, and he—"

"Three," insisted Pyotr Ivanich. "The first, in order of time, is that *one*. Another man, not having met you for several years, would have turned away from you on meeting, but he invited you to his house and when you arrived with your sour face he asked you sympathetically if you were not in need of anything, offered you his services, his help, and I am sure would have given you money. And in our times this is the stumbling-block in many friendships. You must bring him to me. I see he's a decent man, though you call him dastardly."

Alexander was standing, his head bowed.

"And who do you consider your second friend is?" continued Pyotr Ivanich.

"Who?" said Alexander in astonishment. "Why—nobody."

"Aren't you ashamed!" cried Pyotr Ivanich. "What d'you say to that, Liza? And he doesn't even blush! And what do you consider me, may I ask?"

"You're ... a relation."

"Imposing title! I thought I was something more. That's bad, Alexander. That's a trait which would be described, even in copy-book maxims, as *base*, and I don't think you'll even find it in Krylov."

"But you have always repulsed me," said Alexander shyly, not raising his eyes.

"Yes, when you wanted to embrace me."

"You laughed at me, at my feelings."

"And why did I?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"You watched my every step."

"Aha! You've said it. 'Watched.' Where will you find another such tutor? Why did I take all this trouble? I might even refer to a few other things, but that would be like a vulgar reproach."

"Uncle!" said Alexander, approaching him with open arms.

"Go back to your place. I haven't done yet," said Pyotr Ivanich coldly. "Your third and best friend, I hope, you will name yourself."

Alexander looked at him again as if asking, "Where is he?" Pyotr Ivanich pointed to his wife.

"There she is."

"Pyotr Ivanich," interrupted Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "Don't try and be subtle, I beg you."

"Don't you interfere!"

"I appreciate my aunt's friendship," murmured Alexander inarticulately.

"No, you don't. If you did you would not have looked at the ceiling, you would have pointed to her. If you appreciated her friendship you would, from respect to her qualities, have hesitated to despise people. She alone would have redeemed the defects of others in your eyes. Who dried your tears and mingled her tears with yours? Who showed sympathy for all your nonsense—and *what* sympathy? Who but a mother would have taken all your affairs to heart, as she did—I don't think even a mother would have! If you had felt this you would not have smiled ironically just now, you would have seen that this is no fox, no wolf, but a woman who loves you like a sister."

"Oh, *ma tante!*" said Alexander, abashed and completely overcome by this reproach. "Surely you cannot think I don't appreciate all this and don't consider you a brilliant exception to the crowd! Heavens, I swear—"

"I believe you, Alexander," she replied. "Take no notice of Pyotr Ivanich. He is making a mountain out of a molehill. He's glad of an opportunity to show off. Stop it, Pyotr Ivanich, for God's sake!"

"I'll be done in a minute—*one last word*. You say you have done all that your duty to others demands."

Alexander could no longer speak, and did not raise his eyes.

"Come now, tell me—do you love your mother?"

Alexander was suddenly roused.

"What a question!" he said. "Whom could I love so well? I adore her, I would give my life for her!"

"Good. Then, apparently, you are aware that she lives and breathes for you alone, that all your joys and sorrows are her joys and sorrows. She no longer measures time by months and weeks, but by the news she gets from you

and about you. Tell me, how long is it since you wrote to her?"

Alexander started.

"About three ... weeks," he muttered.

"No. It's four months. What do you think of that? Come now, what sort of an animal are you? Perhaps you can't give it a name because it's not in Krylov?"

"And what?" asked Alexander, alarmed.

"I'll tell you what—the old lady is ill with grief."

"Oh, is she? My God, my God!"

"It's not true," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, and ran to the escritoire, from which she took a letter and handed it to Alexander. "She's not ill, but she's very melancholy."

"You spoil him, Liza," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"And you're really too severe. Circumstances distracted Alexander temporarily—"

"To forget one's mother for a chit of a girl! Fine circumstances!"

"That'll do, for goodness' sake!" she said firmly, and pointed to her nephew.

Alexander had finished reading his mother's letter, and was hiding his face behind it.

"Don't try to stop my uncle, *ma tante*! Let him thunder out his reproaches! I deserve worse. I'm a monster!" he said, his face working desperately.

"Never mind, Alexander," said Pyotr Ivanich. "There are many such monsters. You were carried away by follies and for a time forgot your mother—that's natural. Love for one's mother is a tranquil emotion. You are all she has in the world—and so it's natural for her to grieve. You don't deserve the extreme penalty for that. I will say, in the words of your favourite author:

*Instead of calling others ugly creatures  
You'd better have a look at your own features!*

and advise you to be indulgent to the failings of others. That's a law we must all observe, if we would go on living. That's all. Well, I'll take a nap."

"Are you angry with me, Uncle?" said Alexander in a voice of profound sorrow.

"What makes you think that? Why should I upset myself? I never dreamed of being angry. I only wanted to play the part of the bear in Krylov's *Monkey and the Mirror*. Did I do it well? Eh, Liza?"

He tried to give her a kiss as he passed, but she turned away.

"I think I obeyed your orders precisely," he added. "What's the matter? Oh, yes, I forgot one thing—what's the state of your heart, Alexander?"

Alexander said nothing.

"You don't need any money?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"No, Uncle."

"Never asks for any!" said Pyotr Ivanich, closing the door behind him.

"What will my uncle think of me?" asked Alexander after a pause.

"The same as before," replied Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "Do you really think he spoke with feeling, from his heart?"

"And didn't he?"

"Not he! I assure you he only wanted to make an impression. Look how methodically he expounded his theories! How he ranged all the arguments against you in regular order! First the weaker ones, and last the strongest. First he laid down the reason for your unfavourable opinion of people ... and then ... all system! He's forgotten it all now, I suppose."

"What a mind! What a knowledge of life and people, what self-control!"

"Yes, a great deal of mind and too much self-control," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, "but—"

"And you, *ma tante*, will you stop respecting me? Believe me, only the shocks I have undergone could have distracted me. Dear God! Poor Mamma!"

Lizaveta Alexandrovna held out her hand to him.

"I shall never cease respecting in you your heart, Alexander," she said. "It is feeling that leads you into error, and so I always pardon your errors."

"Oh, *ma tante*, you are an ideal woman."

"Simply a woman."

His uncle's harangue had made a great impression on Alexander. He fell into anguished meditation, seated at his aunt's side. The tranquillity she had with such skill and labour implanted in his heart seemed suddenly to have deserted him. She waited in vain for some angry outburst, tried to challenge him to a spiteful remark, and perpetrated the most pointed witticisms at the expense of Pyotr Ivanich. Alexander was deaf to all her endeavours, had nothing to say for himself. He seemed to have been doused with cold water.

"What's the matter with you? What makes you like this?" his aunt asked.

"Oh, *ma tante*, I feel sick at heart! My uncle has made me see myself as I am—he has made a devastating analysis."

"Take no notice of him! He is not always right, you know!"

"Oh, don't try and comfort me! I am now hateful in my own eyes! I have despised and detested others, and now I despise and detest myself! You can get away from people, but where can you hide from yourself? Every-

thing is so trivial—all these comforts, the emptiness of life, other people, myself....”

“It’s all Pyotr Ivanich!” said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, sighing profoundly. “He’s enough to drive anybody to despair!”

“There is only one comfort left to me, and that a negative one—I have deceived no one, have been fickle or faithless neither in love nor in friendship.”

“Nobody has known how to appreciate you,” said his aunt. “But believe me a heart will be found capable of doing so. I assure you it will. You are still so young—forget all this, do something! You have talent—write! Are you writing anything now?”

“No.”

“Write!”

“I’m afraid, *ma tante*.”

“Take no notice of Pyotr Ivanich! Talk to him about politics, agriculture, about anything you like but poetry. What he says about that will never be worth hearing. The public will appreciate you, see if they don’t. Promise me you will write.”

“Very well.”

“Will you begin soon?”

“As soon as I can. My only hope lies in that now.”

Pyotr Ivanich, having had his nap, came back to them, fully dressed, with his hat in his hand. He, too, advised Alexander to busy himself with his work at the office, and at the agricultural department of the magazine.

“I will try, Uncle,” said Alexander. “But I have just promised my aunt, here....”

Lizaveta Alexandrovna made him a sign to be quiet, but Pyotr Ivanich had noticed.

“What? What have you promised her?”

“To bring me some new music,” she put in.



"No, that's not it. What was it, Alexander?"

"To write a novel or something."

"Haven't you given up the idea of fiction yet?" exclaimed Pyotr Ivanich, flicking a speck of dust from his coat. "You shouldn't try and lead him astray, Liza."

"I have no right to give it up," said Alexander.

"What prevents you?"

"Why should I wilfully and ungratefully reject the honourable vocation to which I am called? One bright hope in life remains to me, and you would have me destroy it, too! If I destroy that which has been implanted in me from above, I destroy my very self."

"Well, and what wonderful thing has been implanted in you—tell me that, please!"

"It's not a thing I can explain to you, Uncle, if you don't understand it yourself. Has anything but a comb ever made your hair stand on end, Uncle?"

"No!" said Pyotr Ivanich.

"There you are, then! Have passions never raged within you, has your imagination never been fired, creating within you exquisite visions begging to be brought to life? Has your heart never throbbed in a special way?"

"Crazy, crazy! Well, what follows?" exclaimed Pyotr Ivanich.

"It follows that to one who has not experienced this it is impossible to explain why, haunted by some restless spirit which repeats, day and night, in dreams, and in waking hours, 'Write, write!' one feels the compulsion to write."

"But you can't write."

"Enough, Pyotr Ivanich! You can't write yourself, so why try and prevent others?" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"Forgive me, Uncle, if I remark that you are no judge of this."

"Who is, then? Is she?"

Pyotr Ivanich pointed to his wife.

"She's only trying to encourage you, and you believe her," he added.

"Why, you yourself advised me to write, when I first came here, to test my powers."

"Well, and you did, and nothing came of it. Now you should give it up."

"Do you mean to say you have never found a single sensible idea, or good line of poetry in my work?"

"Certainly I have. You're no fool—as if one could fail to find a single bright idea among such a weight of work by a clever man? But that's not talent, you know, it's just brains."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lizaveta Alexandrovna, moving impatiently in her chair.

"As for heart-throbs, trepidation, ecstasies and all that—who has not known them?"

"First and foremost you yourself, I believe," remarked his wife.

"There you are! Have you forgotten how I admired—"

"Admired what? I don't seem to remember."

"Everyone experiences all those things," pursued Pyotr Ivanich, turning to his nephew. "Who is there that is unmoved by the stillness, the darkness of night, or, let us say, by the rustling of leaves in a grove, by a garden, pools, the sea? If artists were the only ones who felt all this, there would be nobody to appreciate them. But to reflect all these sensations in one's work is quite another matter. That requires talent, and I don't think you

have any. It can't be concealed—it shines from every line, from every stroke of the brush."

"Pyotr Ivanich, it's time for you to be going," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"In a minute!"

"You want to shine," he continued, "and you have the opportunity. The editor praises your work, he says your articles on agriculture are excellently written, that there are ideas in them. Everything shows, he says, that they are the work of a trained mind, and no mere craftsman. I was pleased. Well, I thought, all the Aduyevs have brains! You see, I have my vanity, too! You could both distinguish yourself at your office, *and* win fame as a writer."

"A nice kind of fame—as a writer on soil!"

"To each his own—some are destined to soar in heavenly regions, others to dig the soil and wrest from it its treasures. I can't see why a modest vocation should be despised. It, too, has a poetry of its own. Why shouldn't you work your way up, amass money by your own labours, marry well, as most people do? What more do you want, I should like to know? Your duty done, your life spent in honourable industry—that's what I call happiness! Look at me—I'm a councillor of state by rank, an industrialist by trade—and if you were to offer me instead the calling of a great poet, I wouldn't accept it, by God, I wouldn't!"

"Pyotr Ivanich, you'll be late, really you will," interrupted Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "It's almost ten."

"Yes, it's high time I was off. Well, good-bye! And they consider themselves, God knows why, remarkable folk!" growled Pyotr Ivanich, as he left.

## II

When he got back to his own house Alexander sat down in an easy chair to think. He went over the whole conversation with his uncle and aunt in his mind, and took himself sternly to task.

How was it that, at his age, indulging in hatred and contempt for others, spying out and criticizing their worthlessness, triviality, failures, picking each and every of his acquaintances to pieces, he had forgotten to subject himself to the same analysis? How blind he had been! And his uncle had lectured him as if he were a schoolboy, exposed all his failings, and in front of a woman, too.

How his uncle must have gained in his wife's eyes today! That didn't matter, of course, it was as it should be. But it was at Alexander's expense that he had gained. His uncle had shown himself incontestably the superior, in every way.

"After that," he mused, "where is the advantage of youth, freshness, ardour of mind and heart, when an older man, with nothing but a certain amount of experience, a man with a callous heart, and no spiritual energy, is able at every step, casually, merely *en passant*, as it were, to humiliate a younger one? When would they be able to fight on equal terms and when would the balance be on his side? On his side, it might be thought, were talent and exuberant spiritual forces ... and yet his uncle was a giant compared to him! With what conviction he argued, how easily he disposed of every objection, achieving his aim with jests and yawns, laughing at emotion, at the heartfelt effusions of friendship and love, in a word, at everything for which the elderly are accustomed to envy the young!"

Going over all this in his mind, Alexander blushed with shame. He took a vow to keep a strict watch over himself, and seize the first opportunity for crushing his uncle, for demonstrating that no amount of experience can take the place of that which has been *implanted from above*, that, prophesy as Pyotr Ivanich might, from this moment not a single one of his cold, methodical prophecies would come true! Alexander would find his own path, and follow it with firm, measured and by no means timid steps. He was no longer the Alexander of three years ago. He had seen into the innermost recesses of his own heart, observed the play of passions, discovered the secret of life, not, of course, without sufferings, against which, however, he had hardened himself once and for all. His future was clear to him, he was up in arms, a man, not a child any more! He had only to step boldly forward, and his uncle would see this, and, in his turn, would play the part of a mere apprentice, in comparison with Alexander, the experienced master. He would discover to his astonishment that there is another life, that there are other distinctions, that there is another kind of happiness, as well as the wretched career which he had chosen for himself, and which—out of jealousy perhaps—he was trying to impose on Alexander. One more noble effort, and the struggle would be over.

Alexander cheered up. Once more he began to create a world of his own, and a rather more sober one than the first had been. His aunt encouraged him in this, but secretly—when Pyotr Ivanich was asleep, or was away at his works, or the English Club.

She questioned Alexander about his occupations. And what pleasure this gave him! He told her the plan of his writings, and sometimes, on the pretext of asking for advice, sought her approval.

She often argued, but still more often agreed with him.

Alexander clung to his work as a man clings to his last hope. "Beyond that," he said to his aunt, "there is nothing left for me any more. Nothing but the bare steppe, waterless, treeless, nothing but gloom and desert lands. What would life be then? I might as well be in my grave." And he worked with a will.

Sometimes the memory of his lost love came back to him, and, agitated, he would take up his pen and write a pathetic elegy. Another time his spleen would well up, bringing with it the hatred and contempt for human beings formerly raging in the depths of his heart, and lo and behold, powerful verse was born of the impulse! At the same time he was planning and working on a novel. He expended on this much thought, emotion and toil, and about six months of his time. At last the novel was ready, revised, and a fair copy made. His aunt was lost in admiration.

The scene of this novel was no longer laid in America, but in some Tambov village. The characters were ordinary people—gossips, liars, monsters of all sorts in frock-coats, traitresses in corsets and picture hats. It was all perfectly correct and appropriate.

"I think this might be shown to my uncle, *ma tante*."

"Yes, yes, of course!" she replied. "And yet—wouldn't it be better to have it published first, without showing him? He's always against that sort of thing, he's sure to say something. You know he regards it as mere child's play."

"Oh no, I think I'll show it to him," said Alexander. "After your judgement and what I myself feel about it, I fear nobody's opinion. Besides, I want him to see...."

So they showed it to Pyotr Ivanich. When he caught sight of the notebook he frowned slightly and shook his head.



"What's this? Have you both been at it?" he asked. "It looks as if there was a lot of it. And what small writing! What makes people write?"

"Don't shake your head!" said his wife. "First listen! Read it to us, Alexander! But you must really listen, you mustn't go to sleep, and then declare sentence. It's easy to pick faults if you want to find them. Be indulgent!"

"No—only be just!" said Alexander.

"There seems to be nothing for it—go ahead!" said Pyotr Ivanich with a sigh, "but I'll only listen on condition, in the first place, that you don't read it after dinner, for then I can't be sure I won't go to sleep. Don't take it to heart, Alexander! You could read anything you liked to me after dinner, it would make me sleepy. And in the second place, that if it's anything sensible I tell you my opinion, but if not I just hold my tongue, and you can think what you like."

Alexander began reading. Pyotr Ivanich, who did not once fall asleep, never took his eyes off Alexander, hardly ever blinking, and twice he nodded approvingly.

"You see!" said his wife under her breath. "I told you!" He nodded to her, too.

The reading went on for two evenings. The first evening, when Alexander stopped, Pyotr Ivanich, to his wife's astonishment, told them all that was still to come.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"It wasn't very hard. The idea isn't new—it's been used hundreds of times. There's really no need to go on, but we'll see how he develops it."

When, the following evening, Alexander came to the end of the last page, Pyotr Ivanich rang the bell. The servant came into the room.

"Get my clothes ready," he said. "Excuse me for inter-



rupting you, Alexander, I'm in a hurry. I shall be late for whist at the club."

Alexander finished reading. Pyotr Ivanich beat a hasty retreat.

"Well, good-bye," he said to his wife and Alexander. "I won't come in here again before going."

"Wait a minute!" cried his wife. "Why don't you say anything about the novel?"

"It was not in the bond," he replied, and made as if to go.

"Sheer obstinacy!" she said. "Oh, he's very stubborn, I know him! Take no notice, Alexander!"

"It's hostility," Alexander told himself. "He wants to drag me down, get me into his own sphere. After all he's a clever official, an industrialist, and nothing more. And I'm a poet."

"You're impossible, Pyotr Ivanich," his wife began, almost in tears. "You might say just *something* at least! I saw you nod, so you must have liked it. You're simply too obstinate to admit it! How can we admit we like a novel? We're too clever for that! Say you think it's good!"

"I nodded because this novel shows that Alexander is clever, but it was not clever of him to write it."

"Come now, Uncle, that sort of judgement—"

"Now listen! You won't believe *me*, so it's no good my arguing. We better find an arbitrator. I'll tell you what I'll do to make an end of all this between us, once and for all! I'll say I'm the author of the novel and send it to a friend of mine who works for a magazine. Let's see what he says! You know him, and will probably trust his judgement. He's a man of experience."

"All right—we'll see!"

Pyotr Ivanich sat down at his desk and rapidly scribbled off a few lines, after which he handed the note to Alexander.

"I have turned author in my old age," he had written. "What's to be done about it? I've taken a fancy to shine in this line too—a whim, I suppose! And here I have perpetrated the enclosed novel. Look it over and if it's worth anything, have it published in your magazine, for money, naturally. You know I don't care to work for nothing. You are astonished, perhaps you won't believe me, but I give you permission to use my name, so you see I can't be lying."

Assured of a favourable opinion of the novel Alexander waited patiently for a reply. He was quite glad his uncle had mentioned payment in his note.

"Very clever of him," he thought. "Mamma complains that she is getting low prices for her corn, she probably won't be sending me any money for a time. A thousand or two would come in very handy just now."

Three weeks passed and there was no reply. At last one morning a large parcel and a letter were brought to Pyotr Ivanich.

"Aha! They've sent it back," he said, looking slyly at his wife.

But he would neither open the parcel nor show it to her, beg as she might. That same evening, before going to his club, he went to see his nephew.

The door was not locked. He went in. Yevsei was stretched out across the floor, snoring. The wick of the night-light, badly scorched, drooped. He looked into the next room—all was darkness.

"Life in the provinces!" growled Pyotr Ivanich.

He roused Yevsei, showing him the door and the wick, and threatening him with his stick. In the innermost room Alexander was seated with his arms on his desk, and his head on his arms; he too was asleep. A piece of paper lay before him. Pyotr Ivanich glanced at it—verses.

He picked up the paper and read the following:

*The spring of youth cannot forever last,  
The fleeting hours of love will ne'er return,  
Long dead is love and buried in the past,  
No more will my fond heart with passion burn.  
And now upon the long forsaken altar  
An idol stands, erected by myself.  
I worship it ... but....*

"And fell asleep himself. Go on, pray, dear boy! Persevere!" said Pyotr Ivanich aloud. "Your own verses, and look how they put you to sleep! What do you need anybody else's judgement for? You've condemned yourself."

"Oh!" said Alexander, stretching. "Still fulminating against my work? Tell me frankly, Uncle, what makes you persecute talent so unremittingly, when you cannot but admit—"

"Envy, Alexander, envy! Judge for yourself: you will achieve fame, honour, perhaps even immortality and I shall remain an obscure man, compelled to be content with the name of a useful drudge. And I'm an Aduyev, too. Say what you like, it hurts. What am I? I have lived out my days quietly, in obscurity, simply doing my duty, and actually proud of it—happy! What a wretched lot, isn't it? When I die, that is to say, when I no longer feel or know anything, *travelling minstrels will not mention me, remote ages, posterity, the world will not resound with my name*, will not know that there was once a councillor of state named Pyotr Ivanich Aduyev, and I shall not be able to console myself with this thought in my grave, even if I and my tomb should be handed down to posterity. How different is your case: when, *extending your thunderous wings, you soar beneath the clouds*,

my only consolation will be that I have contributed *my drop of honey* to the mass of human labour, as your favourite author says."

"Never mind him—why do you call him my favourite author? He merely mocks at his neighbour."

"Mocks, does he? Is it not since you found your own portrait in Krylov that you have cooled towards him? *A propos!* Are you aware that your future fame, your immortality is in my pocket? Of course I would prefer that your money was there—"

"My fame?"

"Well—the answer to my note."

"Oh! Give it to me at once, for God's sake. What does he write?"

"I haven't read it—read it yourself, read it aloud."

"How could you restrain your impatience?"

"What's it to me?"

"What? Aren't I your nephew? Didn't you want to know? What indifference! It's sheer egoism, Uncle!"

"Perhaps. I won't deny it. But after all, I know what's in it. Read."

Alexander started reading aloud and Pyotr Ivanich tapped his boots with his cane as he listened. This is what was in the letter:

"What's the mystery, Pyotr Ivanich? *You* write a novel! Who's going to believe that? And you thought you could take in an old hand like me! Even if, which God forbid, it were true, if you diverted your pen from lines which are, in the literal sense of the word, so dear, every one being worth its weight in gold, and, abandoning your esteemed accounts, had written the novel lying before me, even then I would say to you that the delicate products of your factory are infinitely more solid than this creation."

Alexander's voice suddenly sank to a lower level.

"But I reject injurious suspicions of you," he continued in low, uncertain tones.

"Louder, Alexander, I can't hear," said Pyotr Ivanich.

Alexander continued in the same low voice:

"Since you are interested in the author of this novel you would probably like to know my opinion. Here it is. The author must be a young man. He is no fool, but for some obscure reason he is angry with the whole world. He writes so savagely, so bitterly. No doubt a disappointed man. Oh, Lord, when will we get rid of people like that! It's too bad that, owing to a false attitude to life, so much talent perishes among us in empty, sterile dreaming, in vain efforts to accomplish that for which the writer has no vocation."

Alexander stopped and caught his breath. Pyotr Ivanich lit a cigar and released a smoke ring. As usual, his face expressed perfect tranquillity. Alexander went on reading in hollow, scarcely audible tones:

"Vanity, dreaminess, the precocious development of emotional tendencies and lack of mental activity, with the inevitable result—idleness—such are the causes of this evil! Science, toil, practical work—only these are capable of bringing our sick, idle young folk to their senses."

"He could have said the same thing in three lines," said Pyotr Ivanich, glancing at his watch, "and he has written a regular dissertation in a friendly letter. What a pedant! Have you read further, Alexander? Don't go on—it's a bore. I have something to say to you."

"No, Uncle, let me drain the cup to the dregs!"

"Go on then, and much good may it do you!"

"This deplorable channelling of spiritual forces," read Alexander, "is displayed in every line of the novel you

have sent me. Tell your *protégé* that in the first place a writer only writes to the purpose when not carried away by self-absorption and prejudice. He must cast a calm, radiant glance at life and humanity, otherwise he will express nothing but his own *ego*, which nobody cares a rap about. This defect is the outstanding feature of the novel. The next and most important condition, and you'd better not tell the author this, in pity for his youth and his vanity as an author—the most restless of all vanities—talent is required and there is not a scrap of talent here. The style is quite correct and irreproachable throughout, the author even knows how to write." Alexander was hardly able to go on reading.

"Why didn't he say that at first," said Pyotr Ivanich, "instead of all this long harangue? You and I are perfectly capable of finding out all the rest without his aid."

Alexander was utterly crestfallen. In silence, like a man stunned by an unexpected blow, he stared blankly at the wall, dull-eyed. Pyotr Ivanich took the letter from his hands and read out the postscript: "If you really want this novel to come out in our magazine I'll include it, as a favour to you, in the summer months, when people don't read much, but there can be no question of payment."

"Well, Alexander, how do you feel?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"Better than might be expected," replied Alexander with an effort. "I feel like a man who has been deceived in everything."

"Say rather, a man who has deceived himself, and desires to deceive others too."

Alexander did not hear this remark.

"Has it all been a dream—has this, too, betrayed me?" he whispered. "Bitter loss! I ought to be used to disappoint-

ment! But why, I should like to know, was this inconquerable impulse to creation implanted in me?"

"That's just it! The impulse was implanted, but the power to create seems to have been forgotten," said Pyotr Ivanich. "I told you so."

Alexander replied with a sigh, deep in thought. Then he began violently pulling out all the drawers in his desk and extracting from them various notebooks and sheets and scraps of paper, which he hurled furiously into the fireplace.

"Don't forget these," said Pyotr Ivanich, pushing towards him the unfinished verses lying on the table.

"Away with them!" cried Alexander desperately, flinging the paper into the fireplace.

"Is that all? Have a good look," said Pyotr Ivanich, casting a glance around him. "Make a good job of it while you're about it. What's that bundle of papers on the top of the wardrobe?"

"Throw it in, too," said Alexander and reached up for it. "It's articles on agriculture."

"Don't burn those. Give them to me," said Pyotr Ivanich, holding out his hand. "That's not nonsense!"

But Alexander did not heed him.

"No," he said furiously. "If noble creative work in the sphere of the beautiful is no longer for me, at least I won't go in for drudgery. Here, fate shall not break me!"

And the bundle flew into the fireplace.

"Too bad!" said Pyotr Ivanich, at the same time rummaging with his stick in the basket under the table, to see if nothing more remained to be cast into the flames.

"And what shall we do with the novel, Alexander? I have it at home."

"You don't need it for papering a partition?"



"No, not now. Shall we send for it? Yevsei! Asleep again! My overcoat will be stolen under your very nose, see if it isn't! Go as fast as you can to my house and ask Vasily to give you the thick exercise-book lying on the desk in my study, and bring it here."

Alexander sat looking at the flames, his head on his hand. The exercise-book was brought. Alexander seemed to hesitate when his eyes fell on the fruits of his six months' toil. Pyotr Ivanich observed this.

"Get it over, Alexander!" he said. "And let's talk about something else."

"In with it!" cried Alexander, flinging the exercise-book into the flames.

They both watched it burn—Pyotr Ivanich with obvious satisfaction, Alexander mournfully, almost tearfully. The top page stirred and rose as if an invisible hand were turning it, the edges curled, it turned black, then warped and suddenly burst into flame. After it the next few pages took fire, and then suddenly lifted slightly and burned all together; the page underneath them was still white, but a few seconds later it also began to turn black at the edges.

Alexander, however, had had time to read: "Chapter III." He remembered what was in this chapter and he felt regret for it. Getting up he seized the tongs to rescue the remains of his work. "Perhaps, still—" hope whispered to him.

"Wait, let me do it with my stick!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "You'll burn your hands with the tongs."

He pushed the exercise-book to the back of the fire, right on the glowing embers. Alexander remained in the grip of uncertainty. The exercise-book was very thick and did not yield at once to the action of the flames. First dense smoke rolled up from it; a tongue of flame occa-

sionally made its way to the top and licked the cover, leaving a black patch and disappearing again. It could still have been saved. Alexander was just stretching out his hand towards it when at that very moment a flame lit up the chairs, the face of Pyotr Ivanich, the desk. The whole book burst into flames which a moment later died down, leaving in their stead a heap of black ash, over which tongues of flame writhed here and there like fiery snakes. Alexander threw down the tongs.

"All over!" he said.

"All over!" echoed Pyotr Ivanich.

"Ugh!" said Alexander. "I'm free!"

"This is the second time I have helped you to clean up your room," said Pyotr Ivanich. "I hope, this time—"

"No bringing back the past, Uncle!"

"Amen to that!" said his uncle, placing a hand on Alexander's shoulder. "Well, Alexander, I advise you to lose no time! Write to Ivan Ivanich at once to send you some work on the subject of agriculture. After all these follies, if you start straight away, you'll do something good. He's always asking me, 'What's become of your nephew?'"

Alexander shook his head mournfully.

"I couldn't," he said. "No, I couldn't! It's all over!"

"Then what do you now intend to do?"

"To do?" he repeated and seemed to be lost in thought. "For the present—nothing."

"One can only do nothing in the provinces. Here one must—but why did you come? It's incomprehensible. Well, enough of that for the present! I have a request to make of you."

Alexander slowly raised his head and cast an interrogatory glance at his uncle.

"You know my partner Surkov, don't you?" said Pyotr Ivanich, moving his chair nearer Alexander.

Alexander nodded.

"You met him at dinner at my house once or twice, but I don't suppose you realize the sort of a bird he is? He's a good chap, but empty-headed. His main weakness is women. He is, unfortunately, as you have seen, not bad-looking, that is to say, rosy, glossy, tall, always curled and scented, dressed up to the nines. And he imagines all women are in love with him—he's a regular fop. But that's not the point—I wouldn't mind that. This is the trouble—as soon as he goes in for some new love affair he starts throwing money about. He squanders it on surprises, gifts, and hospitality. He begins showing off, buys a new carriage, new horses ... sheer extravagance. He paid court to my wife, too. I actually stopped sending my servant for theatre tickets—Surkov was sure to bring them. If horses had to be changed, some rarity to be found, a way to be made through the crowd, a country house to be inspected, anything like that, he was admirable. Such a useful man, you'd never be able to hire one like him! Too bad! I took care not to get in his way, but my wife got sick of him. So I had to drive him away. When he starts on a fling the interest on his capital isn't enough for him, and he begins asking me for more money. When I refuse he mentions his capital. 'What's the use of your factory to me? I never have any loose cash in my pockets.' If he were to take up with some—But no—he's for ever seeking liaisons in society. 'What I need,' he says, 'is a superior affair. I can't live without love.' Isn't he an ass? Nearly forty, and can't live without love!"

Alexander thought of himself and smiled mournfully.

"He's a liar," continued Pyotr Ivanich. "I soon found out what he really wanted. He only wants to be able to

boast, for people to say he is having an affair with so-and-so, to be seen in the box of so-and-so, or *tête-à-tête* on the balcony of a country house with so-and-so late at night, or driving with her in some lonely place, or riding with her. And yet it turns out that these superior affairs—devil take them!—cost a great deal more than inferior ones. And that's why the idiot is always in trouble."

"What are you leading up to, Uncle?" asked Alexander. "I don't see where I come in here."

"You will see in a minute. Not long ago Julia Pavlovna Tafayeva, a young widow, came back from abroad. She's very good-looking. Her husband was a friend of Surkov and myself. Tafayev died in foreign parts. Well, have you guessed?"

"Yes—Surkov is in love with the widow."

"Quite right. He's gone quite crazy. And what next?"

"That I don't know."

"What a slow-witted fellow you are! Then listen: Surkov has intimated to me several times that he will soon be in need of money. I guessed at once what that meant, but I could not make out which way the wind was blowing. I tried to find out what he needed money for. He hemmed and hawed and at last said he wanted to furnish an apartment on Liteinaya Street. I tried to think what there was about Liteinaya Street and then I remembered that Tafayeva lives there, right opposite the house he had chosen. He had already given a deposit. Catastrophe imminent ... unless you come to the rescue. Now have you guessed?"

Alexander raised his head slightly, let his glance travel over the walls and ceiling, and then blinked several times and turned his glance upon his uncle, but said not a word.

Pyotr Ivanich looked at him, smiling. There was nothing he enjoyed so much as discovering mental lapses

or lack of ingenuity in others, and letting them see that he had done so.

"What's the matter with you, Alexander? And you a novelist!" he said.

"I've guessed, Uncle."

"Thank heavens!"

"Surkov is asking for money. You haven't any and you want me—"

Pyotr Ivanich laughed. Alexander looked at his uncle in surprise without finishing the sentence.

"That's not it!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "As if I'm ever without money! Ask me for some, and you'll see! No, this is what it is. Tafayeva asked him to remind me of my acquaintance with her husband. I went to see her. She asked me to come again. I said I would and promised to take you. Now you understand, I hope."

"Me?" repeated Alexander, gazing wide-eyed at his uncle. "Oh, yes, of course, now I understand," he added hurriedly, stumbling over the last word.

"And what is it you have understood?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"I'll be hanged if I know! Wait a bit—perhaps she has an interesting circle of acquaintances and you want me to find distraction ... seeing how melancholy I am."

"Wonderful idea! As if I would take you about to people's houses just for that! After this it would only remain for me to put a handkerchief over your mouth against the flies when you are asleep. No, that's not it at all! This is what it is—make Tafayeva fall in love with you!"

Alexander raised his eyebrows and looked at his uncle.

"You're joking, Uncle! It's absurd!" he said.

"Where there really is absurdity you take it very seriously, and where there is a simple natural matter you

call it absurdity. What's absurd about it? Think how absurd love itself is—the pounding of the pulses, the play of vanity ... but what's the good of talking to you? You still believe in a destined object of love, in affinities—”

“Excuse me—I no longer believe in anything whatever. But how can one love, or win another's love, to order?”

“*One* can, it's you who cannot. Don't be afraid—I shall not impose such a difficult task upon you. This is all you have to do. Pay court to Tafayeva, be attentive, don't leave Surkov alone with her ... quite casually you know ... drive him mad! Get in his way—when he says one word—say two; when he states an opinion—contradict him flatly. Get him into a fix whenever you can, upset his plans at every step—”

“What for?”

“You still don't understand? In order, my dear fellow, that he should first be driven to distraction from jealousy and vexation, and then grow cool. The one soon follows the other with him. He is ridiculously vain. Then he won't need an apartment, his capital will remain untouched, the affairs of the factory will go on smoothly. Now do you understand? I've already played this game with him five times—formerly, when I was young and a bachelor, I acted for myself, or if unable, got a friend to act for me.”

“But I don't know her,” objected Alexander.

“That's why I want to take you to her next Wednesday. On Wednesdays some of her old friends gather round her.”

“But if she responds to Surkov's love, you will agree that my attentions will infuriate her as well as him.”

“Nonsense! A decent woman, once having seen through a fool, will have nothing to do with him, especially before witnesses—her vanity won't allow her to. And if another, cleverer and better-looking, appears at his side,

she will be ashamed and throw him over in no time. It is for that I have selected you."

Alexander bowed.

"Surkov is not dangerous," continued his uncle. "But Tafayeva receives very few visitors, and in her little circle he may pass for a celebrity and a sage. Outward appearances have a great effect on women. Surkov knows how to make himself pleasant, and so they put up with him. Perhaps she flirts with him, and he thinks— Even clever women like it when follies are committed for them, especially expensive ones. But it is generally someone else they love, not the one who commits the follies. Surkov is not the only one who fails to understand this— give him a lesson."

"But Surkov probably goes there on other days, too. Say I get in his way on Wednesdays:—how will it be on the other days of the week?"

"Must I teach you everything? Flatter her, pretend to be a little in love—the next time she'll invite you for some other day, Thursday or Friday. Redouble your attention, and then I will start working on her, I'll hint that you are really ... you know what! As far as I can make out she's ... susceptible ... probably has weak nerves. I think she, too, has nothing against true sympathy ... and effusions."

"But it's impossible," said Alexander thoughtfully. "If I were still capable of falling in love— But I'm not ... nothing would come of it."

"On the contrary! If you were to fall in love you would be unable to counterfeit, she would see through you at once and start playing you against each other. As it is, all you have to do is to infuriate Surkov. I know him like my own five fingers. As soon as he sees that he is out of luck he will stop wasting his money for nothing



and that's all I want. Look here, Alexander, this means a great deal to me! If you bring it off—remember those two vases you liked at the factory? You shall have them. But you'll have to buy pedestals yourself."

"My dear Uncle, do you really think I—"

"Why should you take trouble and lose your time for nothing? Done? Never mind—the vases are very fine. In our times people don't do anything for nothing. When I do something for you, offer me a present—I'll accept it."

"It's a strange task," said Alexander uncertainly.

"I hope you will not refuse to undertake it. I am ready to do all I can for you. When you need money come to me. Wednesday, then! This affair will only last a month—two at the most. I'll let you know when you're not required any more and you can give it up."

"Very well, Uncle, I'm willing. But it's very strange. I won't answer for my success—if I were still capable of love it would be different ... but I'm not."

"And a good thing, too, or you'd spoil the whole business! I will be answerable for the success of it. Good-bye!"

He went, but Alexander sat long at the fireside, watching the beloved ashes.

When Pyotr Ivanich got home his wife asked:

"How is Alexander, and what about his novel? Will he go on writing?"

"No, I have cured him for ever."

He told her the contents of the letter he had received with the novel and how they had burned everything.

"You are ruthless, Pyotr Ivanich," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, "or else you don't know how to carry out properly anything you undertake."

"You did a fine thing urging him to spoil so much paper! D'you mean to say he has talent?"

"No."

Pyotr Ivanich gazed at her in astonishment.

"Then why did you—"

"You still don't understand, you haven't guessed?"

He said nothing, involuntarily remembering his own words to Alexander.

"What is there to understand? It's all so clear," he said, gazing at her.

"Tell me what it means then?"

"You ... you ... wanted to give him a lesson ... but differently, more gently, in your own way."

"Such a clever man and he can't understand! Why was he so gay, so healthy, almost happy of late? Because he hoped. And I supported him in this hope. Well, is it clear now?"

"So you were humouring him all the time?"

"I think it was pardonable. And what have you done? You don't feel the slightest pity for him—you have taken away his last hope."

"Nonsense! Why his last? There are many follies ahead still."

"What will he do now? He'll go about hanging his head again."

"No, he won't! He won't have any time. I have given him work to do."

"What work? Another article on potatoes to translate? Can this really satisfy a young man, especially such an ardent ecstatic nature? All you think about is to provide him with mental occupation."

"No, my dear, it's nothing to do with potatoes, though it does concern the works."

### III

Wednesday came round. Some twelve or fifteen guests were assembled in the drawing-room of Julia Pavlovna. Four young ladies, two bearded foreigners whose acquaintance the hostess had made while abroad, and an officer formed one circle.

Apart from the rest, on a couch, sat an old man who looked like a retired military man, with two tufts of grey hair on his upper lip and a great many ribbons on the lapel of his coat. He was talking to an elderly man about rents and leases.

In another room an old woman and two men were playing cards. A very young girl was seated at the piano, and another, sitting beside her, was talking to a student.

The Aduyevs arrived. Few people could enter a drawing-room with such ease and dignity as Pyotr Ivanich. After him, somewhat uncertainly, came Alexander.

What a difference there was between them—one a head higher than the other, well-built, stout, a man of powerful, healthy disposition, with assurance in his glance and manners. The thoughts and character of Pyotr Ivanich were not to be guessed at from his glance, his movements, or his words—so skilfully was everything in him concealed by his manners and self-control. Every gesture and glance seemed to have been calculated in advance. His pale, imperturbable countenance showed that in this man the play of the passions was held in strict subservience by the mind, that his heart beat high or subsided according to the dictates of his mind.

In Alexander, on the contrary, everything betrayed a weak and delicate constitution—the changing expressions flitting over his face, a kind of languor, slowness and uncertainty in his movements, the limpid glance

which showed every sensation of his heart, every thought stirring in his mind. He was of medium height, but thin, and his pallor, unlike that of Pyotr Ivanich, was not natural to him, but the result of an incessant inner agitation. Unlike his uncle's, his hair did not show abundant growth on head and cheeks, but descended from his temples and to the back of his head in long, light locks which shimmered like silk.

The uncle introduced the nephew.

"And where's my friend Surkov?" asked Pyotr Ivanich, looking round in surprise. "Has he deserted you?"

"Oh, no, I am very grateful to him," replied the hostess. "He often comes to see me. You know, except for my late husband's friends, I see hardly anyone."

"But where is he?"

"He'll be here in a minute. Fancy, he promised me and my cousin faithfully to get us a box for tomorrow's performance, though everybody says it's impossible ... and he's gone for it now."

"He'll get it. I'll answer for him. He's a genius at that sort of thing. He always gets me tickets when neither connections nor interest are of any avail. Where he gets them, and what he pays for them, is his secret."

At last Surkov arrived. His clothes were spruce, but in every fold of his coat, in every detail of his toilet, could be clearly seen pretensions to celebrity, to superiority over all other fashionable men, over fashion itself. If, for example, the fashion demanded frock-coats worn open, his opened so wide that it looked like the extended wings of a bird. If turned-down collars were the rage, he ordered himself a collar that made him look, in his frock-coat, like a miscreant caught from behind, trying to struggle out of his captor's grip. He himself instructed his tailor how to make his clothes. He now appeared in

the Tafayeva drawing-room with his cravat fastened to his shirt by a pin of such extravagant dimensions that it was more like a club.

"Well, did you get it?" came from all round.

Surkov was just going to reply when, catching sight of Aduyev and his nephew, he broke off short with a glance of surprise.

"He has a foreboding," said Pyotr Ivanich to his nephew softly. "Why, he's carrying a stick—what's the meaning of that?"

"What's that for?" he asked Surkov, pointing to the stick.

"I stumbled getting out of my carriage the other day, and I'm rather lame," replied the other with a little cough.

"Rubbish!" whispered Pyotr Ivanich to Alexander. "Observe the handle—d'you see the golden lion's head? The other day he boasted to me that he paid Barbier six hundred rubles for it, and now he's showing it off. That gives you an idea of the means he employs. Fight him, drive him from his position!"

Pyotr Ivanich pointed through the window to the house opposite.

"Remember, the vases are yours," he added. "Pluck up your spirit!"

"Have you a box for tomorrow's performance?" Surkov asked Tafayeva, approaching her with a triumphant air.

"No."

"Then allow me to present you with one!" he said, finishing the sentence with the reply of Zagoretsky from Griboyedov's *Wit Works Woe*.

The ends of the officer's moustache twitched in a slight smile. Pyotr Ivanich cast a sidelong glance at his nephew, and Julia Pavlovna blushed. She at once invited Pyotr Ivanich to the box.

"Thank you very much," he replied. "Tomorrow I am on duty in the theatre with my wife. But allow me to present a young man as my substitute!"

He pointed to Alexander.

"I was just going to invite him, too. There are only three of us—my cousin, myself, and ..."

"He will substitute for me, too," said Pyotr Ivanich. "And, if necessary, for that rascal!"

He pointed to Surkov and said something to Julia Pavlovna in a low tone. While he was speaking she twice stole a glance at Alexander and smiled.

"Thanks!" said Surkov, "but you should have suggested this substitute before, when there was no ticket. We'd see then how he would have substituted me."

"Oh, I am extremely obliged to you," said the hostess to Surkov eagerly. "I only didn't invite you to the box because you have a stall. You probably prefer to sit in front of the stage—especially for the ballet."

"No, no, you are prevaricating, you don't believe that! Change a place beside you—not for the world!"

"But the place is already promised."

"What? To whom?"

"To M. Renier."

She pointed to one of the bearded foreigners.

"*Où, Madame m'a fait cet honneur,*" the latter murmured hastily.

Surkov, his mouth open, looked from the foreign gentleman to Tafayeva.

"I'll change with him. I'll offer him my stall," he said.

"You can try."

The bearded man disclaimed the offer with the utmost eagerness.

"My profoundest thanks," said Surkov to Pyotr Ivanich, casting a sidelong glance at Alexander. "I owe this to you."

"Not at all, my dear fellow! Perhaps you'd like to come to my box. There'll only be my wife and I. You haven't seen her for a long time—you could pay her court."

Surkov turned from him in vexation. Pyotr Ivanich quietly departed. Julia seated Alexander at her side and engaged him in conversation for a whole hour. Surkov made several rather awkward attempts to enter into the conversation, but there was a certain irrelevance in all he said. He mentioned the ballet receiving "Yes" for an answer when it should have been "No," and vice versa. It was obvious that nobody was listening to him. Then he turned the subject to oysters, declaring that he had eaten a hundred and eighty that morning, and was not vouchsafed so much as a glance. He uttered a few more commonplaces, but seeing they gained him nothing, seized his hat and began hovering around Julia, giving her to understand that he was displeased and intended to go. But she took no notice.

"I'm going!" he said at last, meaningly. "Good-bye!"

Beneath the words could be discerned ill-concealed vexation.

"So soon?" she said calmly. "Be sure to look in at the box for a minute tomorrow."

"What hypocrisy! A minute! You know very well I would not exchange a place among the gods for a place at your side!"

"If you mean the theatrical gods, I believe you."

He no longer wanted to go. His vexation had melted beneath Julia's kindly words at parting. But everyone had seen him take his leave, there was no help for it and he went, looking behind him like a dog anxious to follow its master, but being driven back.

Julia Pavlovna was twenty-three or twenty-four years of age. Pyotr Ivanich had guessed right—her nerves



really were weak, but this did not prevent her from being an extremely pretty, intelligent and graceful woman. She was, however, shy, dreamy and sensitive, like most nervous women. Her features were delicate and refined, her glance gentle, always pensive, often melancholy, for no reason or, if you will, on account of her nerves.

Her views on the world and life were not precisely favourable, she had meditated over the question of her own existence and come to the conclusion that she was superfluous in this world. But if, which God forbid! anyone, ever so casually, mentioned the tomb, or death in her presence, she would turn pale. The brighter side of life escaped her vision. In a garden or a grove, she would choose a dark, dense avenue for her walk, glancing indifferently at a smiling landscape. At the theatre she went to serious dramas, seldom to comedies, never to operettas. She shut her ears to the sounds of gay songs which sometimes reached her, and she never smiled at a joke.

Sometimes her features expressed weariness, not the weariness of suffering or sickness, it was a kind of intoxication of weariness. It was clear that she waged an inner struggle with certain alluring aspirations, and that the struggle fatigued her. After these bouts she would remain silent and melancholy for a long time, and then suddenly be overcome by a mood of causeless gaiety, which was, however, quite in harmony with her nature. That which amused her would not have amused another. All nerves! But what will not these ladies call it? *Destiny, sympathy, instinctive attraction, mysterious sorrow, vague desires*—the words jostle one another, but always end up with the one word “nerves” accompanied by a sigh and a bottle of smelling salts.

“How well you understand me!” said Tafayeva to Alexander, when he took leave of her. “Not a single man, not

even my husband, has ever really understood my nature!"

The fact is that Alexander himself was just such another as herself. What a field for him!

"Good-bye."

She gave him her hand.

"I hope you will find your way to me without your uncle, now," she added.

The winter came. Alexander usually dined at his uncle's on Fridays. But four Fridays passed, and he did not come, nor did he come on the other days of the week. Lizaveta Alexandrovna was quite angry. Pyotr Ivanich growled at being made to wait for dinner an unnecessary half hour.

But Alexander was not idle. He was fulfilling his uncle's instructions. Surkov had long stopped going to Tafayeva's, and spread it abroad that all was over between them, that he no longer had anything to do with her. One evening—it was a Thursday—Alexander, returning home, found on his table two vases, and a note from his uncle. Pyotr Ivanich thanked him for his friendly efforts and invited him to come to dinner the next day, as usual. Alexander sat thinking, as if this invitation upset his plans. The next day, however, he went to Pyotr Ivanich an hour before dinner-time.

His uncle and aunt showered questions on him:

"What's the matter with you? We never see you! Have you forgotten us?"

"Well, you've done me a service!" continued Pyotr Ivanich. "Beyond all expectation! And how modest we were—'I can't, I don't know how.' He doesn't know how! I've been wanting to see you for ages, but there's no getting hold of you. Well, I'm most grateful. Did the vases arrive safely?"

"Oh, yes! But I'll send them back to you."

"Why? No, no! They're yours by all the rules of the game."

"No," said Alexander resolutely. "I will not accept this present."

"Just as you like. My wife likes them, she'll take them."

"I had no idea, Alexander," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna with a sly smile, "that you were such an adept in these affairs ... not a word to me...."

"It was Uncle's idea," replied the embarrassed Alexander. "I go for nothing in this, it was he who taught me."

"Just hark to him! He 'goes for nothing'! And look how he managed the affair! I'm most grateful—most! That fool of a Surkov almost went out of his mind. I thought I should die! A fortnight ago he came running to me in a pitiful state. I understood immediately what was wrong, but I didn't let him see I did, and went on writing as if I knew nothing at all about it. 'Oh, is it you?' I said. 'What's going on in the world?' He smiled, pretending to be perfectly calm .... but he was on the verge of tears. 'Nothing good,' he said. 'I bring you bad news.' I looked at him as if I were astonished. 'What news?' I asked. 'News of your nephew,' says he. 'What is it? What's up? Tell me at once,' says I. And suddenly his calm broke down. He began shouting, raging. I pushed my chair out of the way of his spluttering. 'You complain that he won't work, and teach him idleness yourself.' 'I?' 'Yes, you! Who introduced him to Julia?' He's one of those men who begin calling a woman by her Christian name the very next day after making her acquaintance, you know! 'Well, and what's the harm of that?' says I. 'The harm of that,' says he, 'is that he's with her from morning to night.'"

Alexander blushed.

"See how he lies from sheer rage, I thought to myself," went on Pyotr Ivanich, glancing at his nephew. "As if Alexander would stay there from morning to night! That's not what I asked him to do, is it?"

Pyotr Ivanich let his cold tranquil glance dwell on his nephew's face, and the glance seemed like a flame to Alexander.

"I ... do go there ... sometimes," he muttered.

"Sometimes—there's a difference," went on his uncle. "Surely not every day. I didn't ask you about that. I knew he was lying. What's there to do there every day? You could die of boredom."

"Oh, no, she's a very clever woman ... exceedingly cultivated ... so fond of music," mumbled Alexander hesitantly, and he rubbed his eye, although there was nothing to rub it for, stroked his left temple, and, taking out his handkerchief, wiped his lips.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna stole a steady furtive look at him, and then turned towards the window, smiling.

"Then you weren't bored? So much the better!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "And I was afraid I had imposed a tiresome task on you! So I said to Surkov: 'Thanks, old boy, for worrying about my nephew. I am deeply obliged to you. But aren't you exaggerating matters a little? It's not such a misfortune after all.' 'Not a misfortune?' he cries. 'He isn't doing anything—a young man should work.' 'And that's no misfortune either,' says I. 'It's nothing to you, is it?' 'Oh, isn't it?' says he. 'He's taken to using all sorts of wiles against me.' 'Ah, so *that's* the misfortune!' says I, teasing him. 'He's put Lord knows what ideas about me into Julia's head. She's quite changed to me. I'll teach him, the milksop'—excuse me, I'm only repeating what he said—'what it means to measure his strength

against me! He simply gained his end by slander. I hope you will bring him to his senses.' 'I'll scold him,' says I, 'I will certainly scold him. But is what you say true? What has he done to annoy you?' Did you send her flowers?"

Pyotr Ivanich again stopped speaking, as if awaiting a reply. Alexander said nothing. Pyotr Ivanich went on:

"'Not true?' says he. 'Why does he take her a bouquet of flowers every day? It's winter—what it must cost him! I know what those bouquets mean!' says he. 'Aha!' thinks I, 'blood is thicker than water. I see kinship does mean something. You wouldn't go to all that trouble for anyone else. But is it really every day?' says I. 'Wait, I'll ask him! You probably invented it.' And he did, didn't he? Surely you didn't—"

Alexander wished the earth would open beneath his feet. But Pyotr Ivanich looked him pitilessly straight in the eyes and awaited a reply.

"Sometimes ... it is true ... I do take her...." said Alexander looking down.

"There you are again—sometimes! Not every day—that would be needless expense. By the way, tell me how much all this cost you! I shouldn't like you to waste your money for me. It's quite enough that you've had so much trouble. Send me in a bill. Surkov raved for ever such a long time, you know. 'They're always out together,' he said, 'either walking, or driving where there aren't so many people.'"

These words seemed to touch Alexander on the raw. He stretched out his legs, which had been tucked beneath his chair, and then returned to his previous position.

"I shook my head incredulously," continued his uncle. "'As if he'd go out with her every day!' says I. 'Ask

the servants!' says he. 'I'd sooner ask him,' says I. Surely it isn't true?"

"I do ... sometimes ... go out with her."

"But not every day! I didn't even ask you about that. I knew he was lying. 'Well, and what of it?' says I. 'She's a widow, she has no man in her life. Alexander is a modest fellow, not like you, you rascal! And so she clings to him. She must have somebody.' He wouldn't hear of it. 'You can't fool me!' says he. 'I know. Always at the theatre with her. Sometimes,' says he, 'I manage to get a box, with God alone knows what trouble, and he sits in it.' At this I could not restrain myself and burst out laughing. 'Serves you right, you blockhead!' I thought. Alexander, Alexander—there's a nephew for you! But I'm ashamed you should take so much trouble for me!"

Alexander felt as if he were on the rack. Great drops of sweat poured down his forehead. He scarcely heard what his uncle was saying, and dared not so much as look either at him or at his aunt.

At last Lizaveta Alexandrovna took pity on him. She shook her head at her husband, reproaching him for tormenting his nephew. But Pyotr Ivanich did not relent.

"In his jealousy Surkov actually assured me," he continued, "that you were madly in love with Tafayeva. 'Sorry,' says I, 'but that is not true —after all that has happened to him he won't fall in love. He knows women too well, he despises them.' It's true, isn't it?"

Alexander nodded without raising his eyes.

Lizaveta Alexandrovna felt sorry for him.

"Pyotr Ivanich!" she said, trying to stem the tide of his speech.

"What is it?"

"A man came from the Lukyanovs not long ago with a note."



"I know. All right. What was I saying?"

"Pyotr Ivanich, you've dropped ash into my flowers again. Look—it's too bad!"

"Never mind, my dear! They say ash is good for flowers. Oh, yes ... what was I saying?"

"Pyotr Ivanich— isn't it time for dinner?"

"Very well. Tell them to serve dinner. By the way, talking about dinner, that reminds me! Surkov says you dine there almost every day, Alexander, and that's why you don't come to us on Fridays any more, and he says you spend days on end alone with her. Hang him and his lies, I'm sick of them! I drove him away at last. You see, he was *lying*. It's Friday today, and here you are in the flesh."

Alexander crossed and uncrossed his legs, and inclined his head towards his left shoulder.

"I am most obliged to you, most! It has been the act at once of a friend and a kinsman," concluded Pyotr Ivanich. "Surkov sees that he hasn't a look in, and has retreated. 'She fancies I will break my heart for her,' says he, 'but she's wrong. I was actually going to furnish an apartment right opposite her house, and God knows what else! She little knows the happiness which was in store for her. I might even have married her if she had known how to attach me. Now it's all over! Your advice was good, Pyotr Ivanich. I shall save both my money and my time.' And now the poor chap is playing Lord Byron, going about with morose looks, and he no longer asks for money. And I too say it's all over now. You've done what you set out to, Alexander, and you've done it with the skill of a master. Now I shall have peace for a long time. Don't worry about it any more! You needn't show up at her house now. I can just imagine how tedious it must be there ... do forgive me. I'll make it up



to you somehow or other. When you need money, come to me. Liza—tell them to give us some good wine for dinner—we'll drink to the successful end of the affair."

Pyotr Ivanich went out of the room. Lizaveta Alexandrovna stole a few furtive glances at Alexander and seeing that he did not say a word, went out too, to give orders to her servants.

Alexander sat on in a kind of trance, gazing at his knees. At last he raised his head and looked round—there was nobody there. He caught his breath, and looked at the clock—exactly four. He hastily picked up his hat, waved his hand in the direction taken by his uncle, and, softly, on tiptoe, looking all round him, made his way to the hall, took his overcoat on his arm, rushed headlong down the stairs and drove off to Tafayeva.

Surkov had not lied. Alexander was in love with Julia. He had noted the first signs of love with something like horror—as if they were symptoms of disease. He was tortured by fear and shame. Fear of once again becoming the victim of the caprices of his own and another's heart, shame before others, first and foremost his uncle. He would have given much to be able to conceal everything from him. Only a mere three months ago since he had so proudly and resolutely renounced love, had even written a rhymed epitaph on that restless emotion, and read it to his uncle, had openly declared his contempt for women. And here he was again at the feet of a woman! Fresh proof of his puerile impetuosity. Heavens! When would he throw off his uncle's devastating influence? Would his life never take a definite, unexpected turn, would it always proceed according to the prophecies of Pyotr Ivanich?

The thought reduced him to despair. He would have been glad to run away from this new love. But how could he? What a difference between his love for Nadenka and

his love for Julia! The first love had been simply a regrettable error of the heart in its clamour for nourishment, and at his age the heart is so indiscriminating, it will fall upon the first object it comes across. But Julia—she was no whimsical chit, unable to understand either him, herself, or love! She was a fully developed woman, physically delicate, but with plenty of spiritual energy—for love. She was all love. She acknowledged no other conditions for happiness in life. And is it a mere bagatelle—to love? It is a gift, too, and Julia was a genius at it. This was the love of which he had dreamed—conscious, rational, but at the same time powerful, oblivious of all outside its domain.

“I do not pant from lust like an animal,” he told himself, “my soul does not faint—a loftier, more significant process is going on within me. I am aware of my happiness, meditate on it, and it is more complete, if perhaps quieter. With what nobility and sincerity, quite without any whimperings, did Julia yield to her feelings! She seemed to be waiting for a man who should understand profound love—and the man appeared. Like the rightful owner he came proudly into his inherited wealth, and was humbly acknowledged. What joy, what bliss!” thought Alexander on his way from his uncle to his lady, “to know that there is a being in the world who, wherever she is, whatever she does, thinks of you, concentrates all her thoughts, occupations, acts, around a single point, a single idea—the beloved! She seems to be your twin—All that she hears and sees, all that she passes by, or that passes her by, is put to the test of the impression on that other, her twin. This impression is known to them both, they have studied one another, and the impression when tested is accepted and confirmed in the soul, where it remains indelibly engraved. The twin renounces her own sensations if they

cannot be shared or accepted by the other. She loves what he loves, hates what he hates. They live inseparable in the same thought, the same feelings. They have one organ of spiritual vision, one organ of spiritual hearing, one mind, one soul."

"What house on Liteinaya, Master?" asked the cab-driver.

Julia loved Alexander even more intensely than he loved her. She hardly realized the strength of her love, and did not try to analyze it. She loved for the first time—but that's nothing, nobody can start by falling in love for the second time. The trouble with her was that her heart was exaggeratedly developed, moulded and prepared by novel-reading not so much for first love, as for that romantic love which is to be found in certain novels but never in life, and which is invariably tragic—simply because it is a practical impossibility. Julia's mind had never found healthy nourishment in her novel-reading, and had not been able to keep up with her heart. She was utterly unable to imagine quiet, simple love with no tempestuous manifestations, with no exaggerated tenderness. She would immediately have cooled to a man if he had not *fallen at her feet* at the first opportunity, if he had not vowed by *all the forces of his soul*, if he had been such an oaf as not to *burn her to ashes in his embraces*, or had ventured to occupy himself with anything outside their love, anything as well as love, if he were not ready to drain the *cup of life* in her tears and kisses.

Out of all this came a dreaminess which created for her a special world. If anything in the ordinary world occurred not according to these special laws, her heart was indignant, she suffered. Her feminine constitution, weak in itself, suffered a shock, and sometimes a very powerful one. Frequent agitation had exacerbated her

nerves, till they were in a state of utter collapse. This is why pensiveness and causeless melancholy, a twilight outlook on life are to be found in so many women. This is why the system by which human beings live—well-balanced, wisely created, and based upon immutable laws—seems to them a heavy chain. This, in a word, is why reality terrifies them, forcing them to create a world of fantasy for themselves.

Who was it that had so prematurely and so unwisely undertaken the moulding of Julia's heart, leaving her mind untouched? Who but that classical triumvirate of teachers summoned by her parents to act as guardians to the youthful mind, to show her the *cause and effect of everything*, to rend the veil from the past and—difficult task!—show what is beneath us, above us, within ourselves. Three nations were called upon for this important work. The parents themselves withdrew from her education, considering that their responsibility was over when, relying on the recommendations of worthy friends, they had engaged Monsier Poulet to teach her French literature and other subjects. Subsequently came Herr Schmidt, for it was the thing to study German, though, of course, there was no need to be too thorough about it; and last came the Russian tutor, Ivan Ivanich.

"But they're all so unkempt!" said Julia's mother. "They're always so badly dressed, worse than footmen! Some of them even smell of drink."

"We can't do without a Russian teacher, we can't, you know," decided her father. "Don't you worry—I'll choose a nice one."

The Frenchman was the first. Both parents made much of him. He was received as if he were a guest, and treated with the greatest respect—he was a very expensive Frenchman.

He found Julia no trouble to teach. Thanks to her governess she could chatter in French, and read and wrote it with hardly any mistakes. All Monsieur Poulet had to do was to set her to write essays. He gave her various subjects—to describe the sunrise, to define love and friendship, to write a congratulatory epistle to her parents, or to pour out her grief on separation from a girl-friend.

But from her window Julia could only see the sun setting behind the merchant Girin's house, she had never parted from a girl-friend, and as for love and friendship ... the idea of these emotions now flashed across her mind for the first time. A beginning has to be made in everything.

Having exhausted his whole repertoire, Poulet determined at last to make a beginning with that time-honoured thin pamphlet, on the title page of which is written in big letters *Cours de littérature française*. Which of us does not remember it? In two months Julia knew French literature by heart, or at least the thin pamphlet, and by another three months she had forgotten it. But its pernicious influence remained. She knew who Voltaire was, and sometimes bestowed on him the authorship of *Les martyres*, while to Chateaubriand she attributed the *Dictionnaire philosophique*. Montaigne she called M. de Montaigne and occasionally confused him with Victor Hugo. Of Molière she knew that he wrote plays, from Racine she learned by heart the famous tirade: *À peine nous sortions des portes de Trezènes*.

In mythology she was delighted with the comedy enacted by Vulcan, Mars and Venus. She was inclined to be on Vulcan's side, till she discovered that he was lame and clumsy, and a blacksmith to boot, when she immediately went over to Mars. She liked, too, the story of Semele and Jupiter, and the description of Apollo's exile and

his tricks when on the earth, accepting everything at its face value, quite unaware of any other meaning in these tales. Was the Frenchman himself aware of it—God alone knows! To her questions as to the religion of the ancients, he wrinkled up his forehead and replied pompously: "*Des bêtises? Mais cette bête de Vulcain devrait avoir une drôle de mine ... écoutez,*" and then added, narrowing his eyes slightly, and patting her hand: "*Que feriez-vous à la place de Vénus?*" She did not answer, but for the first time in her life she blushed without knowing why.

The Frenchman finally perfected Julia's education by acquainting her in fact as well as in theory with the modern school of French literature. He put into her hands *Le manuscrit vert*, *Les sept péchés capitaux*, *L'âne mort*, each of which had created a sensation in its day, and innumerable other volumes then flooding France and the rest of Europe.

The poor girl embarked eagerly upon this boundless ocean. What heroes these Janines, Balzacs and Druineaus, and the whole procession of geniuses seemed to her. What was the pitiful tale of Vulcan in comparison with their glorious images? Venus was a mere innocent in comparison with these new heroes. She devoured the works of the *école nouvelle*, and is probably doing so to this day.

While the Frenchman had gone so far, the solid German had not yet got his pupil through the grammar. With the utmost gravity he compiled tables of declensions and conjugations, invented, with many a rhyme and quirk, intricate ways for remembering case-endings.

But when he was asked to provide literature the poor man took fright. He was shown the Frenchman's pamphlet, over which he shook his head, saying German could not be learned like this, and that extracts from all the writers were to be found in Ahler's textbook. But he was not to



be let off so lightly, he was urged to acquaint Julia with all sorts of authors as Mr. Poulet had done.

At last the German promised to do so and went home deep in thought. He opened, or rather unfastened his book-case, taking one door right off and leaning it against the wall, for the bookcase had long possessed neither hinges nor lock, and took out of it a pair of old boots, half a sugar-loaf, a bottle of snuff, a carafe for vodka, a crust of black bread, a broken coffee-mill, a set of razors, a cake of soap, a shaving-brush stuck into an ointment jar, a pair of old braces, a stone for sharpening penknives and various other odd articles. At last behind all this a book appeared, a second, a third, a fourth—five in all. He clapped them against one another, so that the dust rose in clouds like smoke, and settled triumphantly on the tutor's head.

The first book was Hessner's *Idylls*—"Gut!" said the German and read with delight the idyll of the broken jug. He opened the second—*Gothic Calendar for 1804*. He looked through it—it contained the dynasties of the European monarchs, pictures of various castles and waterfalls—"Sehr gut!" said the German. The third was a Bible. He put it aside, muttering piously, "Nein!" The fourth was Young's *Night Thoughts*; he shook his head muttering "Nein!" The last was Weiss, and the German smiled triumphantly. "*Da habe ich's!*" he said. When he was reminded of Schiller, Goethe and others, he shook his head, obstinately repeating, "Nein!"

Julia began to yawn after the German had read the first page of Weiss and then stopped listening altogether. And all she remembered of German was a few rhymes about grammar and syntax.

And the Russian teacher? He was even more conscientious than the German. He assured Julia tearfully, that a



proper noun or a verb was a part of speech, and a preposition another, and at last managed to convince her of this, so that she learned by heart the definitions of all the parts of speech. She could even race off the prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs, and when the teacher solemnly enquired: "And what are the interjections denoting fear or astonishment?" she would immediately, without pausing for breath, declaim: "ah, oh, eh, alas, O! well, uh-huh." And her instructor was in ecstasies.

She also knew a few truths culled from the syntax, but could never manage to apply them in practice and made grammar mistakes for the rest of her life.

From history she learned that there had been a certain Alexander of Macedonia, who had fought a great deal and been extremely brave ... and, by the way, extremely handsome ... but what else he was renowned for and what was the significance of the age in which he lived, neither she nor her teacher cared to know, indeed this is almost all there is on the subject in Kaidanov's *History*, either.

When literature was demanded of the Russian teacher he brought a heap of old, worn tomes. Here were Kante-mir and Sumarokov, Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Ozerov. Her parents were astonished. They cautiously opened one, sniffed at it and threw it aside, demanding something more modern. The teacher brought Karamzin. But who could read Karamzin after the writers of the new French school? Julia read *Poor Liza*, and a few pages from the *Travels* and returned the book.

There were plenty of intervals for the unhappy pupil between these lessons, but no pure, healthy nourishment for her thoughts. Her mind began to slumber, and her heart to beat the alarm. An obliging cousin stepped into the breach in the nick of time, with selections from Pushkin — *Yevgeny Onegin*, *The Captive of the Caucasus*,

and so on. And the maiden tasted the sweetness of Russian poetry. She learned *Yevgeny Onegin* by heart, and always kept the volume under her pillow.

Neither her cousin nor any other instructors were capable of showing her the significance and qualities of the poem. She took Tatyana as her model, mentally repeating to an ideal lover the burning lines of Tatyana's letter to Onegin, her heart throbbing and aching. Her imagination sought now an Onegin, now a hero from the masters of the new school—pale, mournful, disillusioned.

An Italian and another Frenchman completed her education, giving to her voice and movements graceful measures, in other words, teaching her to dance, to sing, to play, or at least mark time on the piano, till she should marry, but teaching her nothing about music itself. And at eighteen, with an expression permanently pensive, an interesting pallor, a slender waist, and a tiny foot, she made her *début* in society drawing-rooms.

Here she attracted the notice of Tafayev, a man with all the attributes of a good *partie*—respectable rank, a good income, a cross on his coat lapel, in a word, with a career and a fortune. It could not be said of him that he was a nice, worthy soul and nothing more! He was by no means a man to be trifled with. He had an extremely sane judgement as to the present state of Russia, and what was lacking in her economic and industrial condition, and was considered a practical man in his own sphere.

The pale, pensive damsel, such a strange contrast to his own stolid nature, made a strong impression on him. At evening parties he would abandon the card-table and fall into unaccustomed meditation when the airy vision whirled past him. If her languid glance happened to rest on him (quite accidentally, of course), he, the brave

gladiator of drawing-room conversation, would be overcome by shyness in the presence of the timid damsel, and find himself unable to say a word to her. He got tired of this and resolved to act more decisively, through the agency of certain ladies.

Inquiries as to her dowry received satisfactory replies. "We are well-matched," he reasoned to himself. "I am only forty-five, she is eighteen. Our combined fortunes are enough and to spare for two. Looks? She is quite sufficiently pretty, and I am what is called a presentable-looking man. They say she's highly educated—well, what about it? I've learned a thing or two in my day, Latin, they taught us, I remember, and Roman history. I can still remember some consul or other, what's his name, hang him! And we read about the Reformation ... and there were those lines: *beatus ille* ... how does it go on? *Puer, pueri, puero* ... no, that's not it, what the devil, I've forgotten it all! And what in God's name are we taught for, but to forget? You may say what you will, but I swear that none of those officials and clever people could say who that consul was ... or the year the Olympian Games were held! People are only taught because it's the thing ... so that people can see by your eyes that you've been at school. And how can you help forgetting? Nobody ever mentions all those things in society afterwards, and if they did I'm sure they'd simply be shown the door. Oh, we make a good pair!"

And so the moment Julia emerged from childhood she encountered that most painful reality—an ordinary husband. How unlike he was to those heroes of her imagination and of the poets!

Five years passed in this dull trance, as she called her loveless marriage, and now freedom and love suddenly appeared. She smiled, opened wide her arms to them, yield-

ing to her passion like a rider on a galloping horse. He is borne forward by the powerful animal, oblivious of space. He catches his breath, houses and trees rush past him, the breeze fans his face, his breast can hardly endure the voluptuous sensation ... or as a man in a small boat yields himself recklessly to the current—the sun warms him, the green shores flicker before his eyes, the playful wave caresses the stern, whispering sweet nothings, the ripples luring him ever further, showing him an endless pathway streaming before him.

And he allows himself to be borne along. There is no time to look around and ask how the path will end. Will the steed hurl itself into an abyss, will the wave dash the barque against a rock? The wind sweeps thought away, the eyes are closed, the charm is irresistible ... and she, too, offered no resistance, but allowed herself to be swept off her feet.... At last the poetic moment of life had arrived! She was in love with that trepidation of the soul, so sweet, so tormenting, she sought agitation, invented both torments and joys for herself. She was the slave of her love as people become the slave of opium, and sipped eagerly at the heart's poison.

Agitated by her suspense Julia stood at the window, her impatience increasing with every minute. She plucked the leaves from a rose bush, and threw them irritably on the floor, anguish at her heart. It was a moment of sheer torture. She played at question-and-answer: he comes, he comes not. The whole force of her imagination was concentrated on the solution of this profound problem. If the answer was "Yes," she smiled, if it was "No," she turned pale.

When Alexander drove up she sank wan and exhausted into a chair—so violent had been the play of her nerves! When he entered the room ... it would be impossible

to describe the look with which she met him, the joy which instantly suffused all her features, as if she had not seen him for a year—whereas they had met only the day before. She pointed silently to the clock, but he had hardly begun to make excuses for himself when, believing him without hearing him out, she forgave him, forgot the pain of suspense, gave him her hand, and they sat down on the sofa and talked for a long time, then sat in silence for a long time, gazing at one another. If the servant had not reminded them, they would certainly have forgotten to have dinner.

What rapture! Never had Alexander dreamed of such completeness of *sincere, soulful effusions*! These excursions to the country in the summer—the crowd might be attracted by music being played somewhere, by fireworks, but they two flitted about among the trees, arm in arm. In the winter Alexander would come to dinner, after which they would sit side by side in front of the fire till nightfall. Sometimes they would order horses to be harnessed to the sleigh, and, borne swiftly along the dark streets, hastened to continue the endless talk begun beside the samovar. Every object around them, every fugitive movement of thought or feeling was remarked on and shared.

Alexander dreaded nothing so much as meeting his uncle. He occasionally went to see Lizaveta Alexandrovna, but she never succeeded in stirring him to frankness. He was always nervous of being caught by his uncle and forced to be drawn into some unpleasant scene, and therefore always cut his visits short.

Was he happy? If the question were asked about someone else in the same case, the answer would have to be “Yes” and “No.” In his case it was “No.” With him love began in suffering. At those moments when he could

forget the past he believed in the possibility of happiness, in Julia, and in her love. At other times he would suddenly be seized by doubt in the midst of the most *sincere effusions*, and listen with misgivings to her passionate, ecstatic ravings. It seemed to him that before he knew where he was she would deceive him, or that some fresh *unexpected blow of fate* would suddenly destroy the exquisite world of bliss. While tasting a moment of joy he realized that it would have to be bought at the price of suffering, and once more he would be plunged in dejection.

But winter passed, summer came, and love did not come to an end. Julia grew ever more attached to him. There was no deception, fate struck no *blow*. On the contrary, his glance grew clearer. He became accustomed to the idea of a constant affection. "But this love is not so passionate," he told himself once, glancing at Julia. "On the other hand it is stable, perhaps eternal. Yes, there can be no doubt of that! At last I understand thee, Fate! Thou wouldst reward me for my past torments and bring me, after long wanderings, to a quiet haven. So this is the haven of happiness! Julia!" he exclaimed.

She started.

"What?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing special! I just—"

"No, tell me! You meant something!"

Alexander was stubborn. She insisted.

"I was thinking that, for the completion of our happiness we lack—"

"What?" she asked in trepidation.

"Oh, nothing! A strange idea came into my head."

Julia was seized with anxiety.

"Oh, do not torture me, tell me at once!" she said.

Alexander thought for a moment and began speaking in a low voice, as if to himself.



"To earn the right never for a moment to leave her, never to go back to my rooms ... to be always and everywhere at her side! To be her legitimate lord in the eyes of the world.... She to call me her own, aloud, neither blushing nor turning pale ... and so on for the whole of life! And to be eternally proud of this...."

With this high-flown utterance he came, gradually, sentence by sentence, to the word—*marriage*. Julia started and melted into tears. She gave him her hand with a feeling of ineffable tenderness and gratitude, and they suddenly began talking with the utmost agitation. They decided that Alexander should speak to his aunt and ask her assistance in this important matter.

They were so happy that they did not know what to do. It was a beautiful evening. They drove outside town to a remote place, and, having at last found a rising in the ground, sat on it the whole evening gazing at the sunset, dreaming of their future life, when they would confine themselves to a small circle of acquaintances, never receive, and pay no unnecessary visits.

When they returned home they began discussing the way they would live, how they would assign the rooms, and so on. They got as far as the furnishing of the rooms. Alexander proposed to take her boudoir for his study, so as to have it next to the bedroom.

"What sort of furniture would you like in your study?" she asked.

"I should like walnut with blue velvet upholstery."

"That's very nice and practical—one should always choose dark colours for a man's study—light ones soon get spoiled by the smoke. And just here in the little passage leading from your future study to the bedroom, I'll have a pyramid of plants and flowers—won't that be



lovely? I'll have an armchair put there, where I can see you in your study, and read and work."

"Soon I won't be taking leave of you like this," said Alexander on going.

She placed her hand over his mouth.

The next day Alexander went to Lizaveta Alexandrovna to reveal to her what she had long been aware of, and to ask her for advice and aid. Pyotr Ivanich was not at home.

"Why not?" she said, after listening to his confession. "You're not a boy any more. You can judge of your feelings and are free to dispose of yourself. But don't be in a hurry—get to know her really well!"

"Oh, *ma tante*, if you only knew her! Such fine qualities!"

"For example?"

"How she loves me!"

"That is, of course, an extremely important quality, but it is not all that is needed for marriage."

Here she uttered a few commonplaces about the married state, and what a wife, what a husband, should be.

"Wait a little! The autumn is coming," she added, "everyone will be returning to town. Then I'll go and see your fiancée. We'll get to know one another, and I'll go in for the matter in earnest. Don't leave her, I'm quite sure you'll be the happiest husband in the world!"

She was in ecstasies.

It is a marvel how fond women are of marrying off their men-friends! Sometimes they see very well that the thing is not coming off, indeed ought not to come off at all, and yet they do everything to help matters on. All they want is to have a wedding, and let the newly-weds manage as best they can. God knows what makes them go to all this trouble!

Alexander asked his aunt to say nothing to Pyotr Ivanich till the very last moment.

Summer flitted by, and the dull autumn season set in. Another winter began. The meetings between Alexander and Julia were as frequent as ever.

She seemed to keep a strict account of the days, hours and minutes they were able to spend together, and was always seeking pretexts for more meetings.

"Will you be going early or late to the office?" she sometimes asked him.

"About eleven."

"Then come to me at ten, we'll have breakfast together. Perhaps you needn't go at all! Can't they get along without you?"

"Oh, but —my country ... my duty...." said Alexander.

"That's all very fine! But you can tell them you love and are loved. D'you mean to say your chief has never been in love? If he has a heart, he will understand. Or you could bring your work here —what's to prevent your working here?"

Another time she would not let him go to the theatre, and she hardly ever allowed him to visit friends. When Lizaveta Alexandrovna came to see her it took Julia a long time to recover from the shock of finding how young and good-looking Alexander's aunt was. She had expected to find in her the usual elderly, plain auntie, and here was a woman of twenty-six or seven, and a beauty! She made Alexander a scene and would not allow him to visit his uncle often.

But what were her jealousy and tyranny in comparison with Alexander's? Though thoroughly assured of her attachment, and aware that treachery and fickleness were not in her nature, he was nevertheless jealous. And how jealous! It was not the jealousy which springs from intense love and manifests itself in tears and groans, in

wails arising from an overburdened heart, the jealousy which comes from the terror of losing happiness—it was a cold, indifferent jealousy. He tyrannized over the poor woman from love as others do not tyrannize from hate. He sometimes considered, for instance, that she did not look long or tenderly enough at him in front of her guests, and he cast savage glances around—and woe betide Julia if there happened at that moment to be some young man at her side, or even a man who was not young, or even not a man, but some woman, sometimes even an inanimate object! Insults, sarcastic remarks, dark suspicions and reproaches were showered upon her. She had to find excuses for herself then and there, and redeem her offence by all sorts of sacrifices, by complete submission—she must not speak to this one, sit in that place, go there, and she thus laid herself open to the sly smiles and whispers of knowing observers, and compromised herself by alternate blushes and pallor.

If she received an invitation, before replying she would cast a questioning glance at Alexander, and at the slightest twitching of his eyebrows she would immediately, pale and trembling, refuse it. Sometimes he gave permission, and then she would get ready, dress, be just going to get into her carriage, when he, obeying some fugitive whim, would pronounce a weighty veto and she must take off her visiting clothes and send away the carriage. Later he would probably ask her pardon, suggest going, but how could she start dressing all over again and order the carriage? So she would stay at home. He was jealous not merely of handsome men, not merely of worth or talent, but even of perfect freaks, and, finally, simply of men whose faces he did not like.

One day Julia was visited by a gentleman from her birth-place, where her kinsmen lived. He was a plain, elderly

man, who talked about the harvest and about his senatorial affairs, and Alexander, tired of listening to him, went into the next room. There was nothing to be jealous of. At last the visitor rose to go.

"I have heard," said he, "that you are at home on Wednesdays. Will you allow me to join the society of your acquaintances?"

Julia smiled and was just going to say "Delighted!" when suddenly, in a whisper louder than any shout, came the words, "Say it's impossible!"

"It's impossible!" said the trembling Julia hastily to her visitor.

But she bore it all. She was not at home to anyone, never went anywhere and stayed at home alone with Alexander.

They continued to sip the cup of their bliss systematically. When the entire store of known and ready-made pleasures was exhausted she invented fresh ones, to vary this world of theirs, which was so rich in pleasures to begin with. What an inventive gift Julia displayed! But even this came to an end. Repetitions set in. There was nothing left to desire or taste.

There was not a single place outside town which they had not visited, not a single play they had not seen in one another's company, not a single book they had not read and discussed. They had studied each other's feelings, way of thinking, virtues and failings, and now nothing was left to prevent their carrying out their design.

Sincere effusions became rarer. Sometimes they sat for hours without exchanging a word. But Julia was happy when she was silent, too.

Every now and then she would put some question to Alexander and receive a "Yes" or "No" in reply, which

contented her. Or if neither was forthcoming she could just gaze steadily at him. He would smile at her and she was happy again. If he neither smiled nor replied she would fall to watching his every movement, his every glance, and interpret them in her own way, and then there would be no end to her reproaches.

They had stopped talking about the future, for this made Alexander feel a certain inexplicable embarrassment and awkwardness, and he would try to change the subject. He had begun to think, to give himself up to meditations. The magic circle enclosing his love-life broke in a few places, and in the distance he glimpsed the faces of friends, all sorts of frivolous pleasures, brilliant balls with a host of beauteous damsels, his uncle busy and practical as always, his abandoned work....

In such a mood he was sitting beside Julia one evening. Outside a blizzard raged. The snow beat against the window-panes and stuck in flakes on the glass. The monotonous ticking of the clock and an occasional sigh from Julia were the only sounds in the room.

For want of anything better to do, Alexander swept a restless glance around the room and looked at the clock—it was ten, and he must sit there another two hours! He yawned. His glance rested on Julia.

She was standing with her back to the fire, leaning against the mantelpiece, her head on one side, following all his movements with her eyes, not, however, with an expression of suspicion and inquiry, but with one of ecstatic bliss. She seemed to be in the throes of some secret sensation, some sweet dream, and to be weary.

She was so high-strung that even pleasurable vibrations caused her painful exhaustion. In her, torture and bliss were inseparable.

Alexander responded with a cool, restless glance. He crossed over to the window and began drumming on the glass and looking out into the street.

The sounds of voices mingled with the humming of carriage wheels reached them from the street. Lights appeared and shadows flitted past in all the windows. It seemed to him that in the most brightly lit rooms a joyous company must be assembled. There, he thought, the animated exchange of thoughts, the play of fiery, fugitive sensations, were going on. There life was noisy and joyful. And in that room with the dimly-lit window, some noble toiler was no doubt bending over his useful work. And Alexander remembered that for almost two years he had been dragging out an idle foolish existence—two years from the sum of his life's span—and all for love! Here he attacked love.

"And what sort of love is this?" he asked himself. "A drowsy thing, lacking in energy! This woman yielded to her feelings without a struggle, without effort, meeting with no obstacles, like a victim. Weak, supine creature! Bestowing her love upon the first-comer! But for me she would have loved Surkov in exactly the same way, she had already begun to love him. Yes, whatever she says, I can see that. If anyone livelier and more experienced than I were to come along, she would yield herself to him. It's simply immoral! Is that love? Talk about the affinity sought by sensitive souls? Were ever souls so attracted as ours? You would have thought they were fused together for eternity, and now look! God knows what it all means, there's no making it out!" he whispered in his vexation.

"What are you doing over there? What are you thinking about?" asked Julia.

"Nothing," said he, yawning, and he sat down on the sofa at some distance from her, throwing his arm round the corner of an embroidered cushion.



"Sit here—nearer!"

He neither moved nor replied.

"What's the matter with you?" she pursued, going up to him. "You're intolerable today!"

"I don't know," he said languidly. "I feel as if ... as though I—"

He did not know how to answer either her or himself. He had as yet not been able to explain to himself what was going on within him.

She sat down beside him and began talking of the future, gradually getting a little livelier. She painted a happy picture of family life, interspersed with little jokes, and concluded tenderly:

"You are my husband. Look," she said, throwing out her hand with a sweeping gesture. "Soon all this will be yours. You will be the master of the house, as you are of my heart. Now I am independent, I can do what I like, go where I choose, but then, nothing can be moved without your orders. I myself will be bound by your will—but what exquisite fetters! Forge them, forge them—and soon! All my life I have dreamed of a man like you, of love like ours ... and now my dream has come true ... and happiness is near. I can scarcely believe it! Sometimes it still seems like a dream to me! Can it be that this is the reward for all my past sufferings?"

Alexander could hardly bear to listen to her.

"And what if I were to stop loving you?" he asked suddenly, trying to make his voice sound facetious.

"I would tweak your ears," she replied, taking him by the ear, and then she sighed and fell pensive, all for a single jesting hint.

He said nothing.

"But what is the matter with you?" she asked with sudden eagerness. "You don't talk, you hardly hear what I say, you look away from me!"



She drew nearer to him and, her hand on his shoulder, began speaking in low tones, almost in a whisper, of the same subject, but with less conviction. She reminded him of the beginning of their intimacy, the beginning of their love, its first symptoms, its first joys. She was almost breathless from her voluptuous sensations. Two red spots glowed on her pale cheeks. These gradually grew redder and redder, her eyes shone, then grew languid, the lids half-closed. Her bosom heaved. Her words were almost inaudible, and the fingers of one hand played in Alexander's silky locks. She gazed into his eyes. He moved his head gently from beneath her hand, took a comb from his pocket and carefully passed it through his hair, which she had just ruffled. She rose and gazed fixedly at him.

"What's the matter with you, Alexander?" she asked anxiously.

"Keeping on at me! As if I knew!" he thought, but did not answer her.

"Are you bored?" she asked, and there was at once a question and a doubt in her voice.

"Bored?" thought he. "That's just the word! Yes, it's this agonizing, killing boredom! This worm has been gnawing at my heart for a month now. Oh heavens, what shall I do? And she speaks of love, of marriage! How am I to bring her to her senses?"

She sat down at the piano and played some of his favourite pieces. He pursued his thoughts without listening to her.

Julia, quite discouraged, sighed, wrapped her shawl round her and flung herself on to a corner of the sofa, from where she followed Alexander with melancholy gaze.

He picked up his hat.

"Where are you going?" she asked in astonishment.

"Home."

"It's not eleven yet."

"I must write to Mamma. I haven't written to her for ages."

"Why, you wrote to her a few days ago."

He was silent. He could find nothing to say. He really had written to his mother, but he had forgotten mentioning it to Julia. And love never forgets a single trifle. To the eyes of love whatever concerns the beloved object is an all-important fact. The mind of a lover spins a complex web of observations, subtle considerations, memories, surmises as to all that concerns the beloved, all that goes on around him and has the least influence on him. In love, a single word, the merest hint, nay, just a glance, an imperceptible movement of the lips, are sufficient material for a surmise, from which spring all sorts of considerations, and it is a short step to some decisive conclusion, from which the lover's own thoughts may create either heaven or hell. The logic of lovers, sometimes false, sometimes astonishingly correct, rapidly creates an edifice of surmises and suspicions, but love has the power to raze it to its foundations with still greater rapidity. Often a single smile, a tear, a couple of words—three at the most—are enough to lull suspicion—nothing can escape or hoodwink the lynx-eyed watchfulness of love. The lover sometimes suddenly takes into his head a thing that would never occur to anyone else, sometimes overlooks what is going on under his very nose, is now as penetrating as a crystal gazer, now myopic to the point of blindness.

Julia jumped off the sofa as agile as a cat and seized him by the hand.

"What's the meaning of this? Where are you going?" she asked,

"It's nothing, I assure you it's nothing! I simply want to have a nap. I slept badly last night, that's all!"

"Slept badly! And you told me this morning that you had slept nine hours, and that your head ached from it!"

So this was no good, either.

"Well, my head does ache," he said, somewhat embarrassed. "That's why I'm going."

"And after dinner you said your head was better."

"My God, what a memory you have! It's intolerable! Well, I just want to go home."

"Aren't you happy here? What will you do at home?"

Looking into his eyes, she shook her head dubiously. He soothed her somehow, and went.

"What if I don't go to Julia today?" Alexander asked himself, on waking up the next morning.

He paced the room a few times.

"I won't!" he added resolutely. "Yevsei! Come and dress me."

And he went out for a stroll in the town.

"How jolly, how pleasant it is to walk about alone," he thought. "You can go where you like, stop, read a poster, look into a shop-window, go here, there, everywhere! It's really very nice! Freedom is a great blessing! Yes, that's just it—freedom in the broadest, highest sense is to be able to walk about alone!"

He struck the pavement with his walking stick, and greeted acquaintances cheerfully. Walking down Morskaya Street he saw a familiar face at the window of a certain house. The owner of the face beckoned to him. He looked again. Why, it was Dumet! And he went in, dined, stayed on till nightfall, went to the theatre and after the theatre went out to supper. He tried not to think of his home. He knew what awaited him there.

And in truth when he got back he found half a dozen

notes on his table and a sleepy servant in the hall. The man had been instructed not to come back till he had seen Alexander. The tear-stained notes were full of reproaches and questions. The next day he would have to find excuses. He would plead business at his office. They would make it up somehow.

A few days later the same thing was repeated on both sides. And after this it happened again and again. Julia grew thin, never went out, received no one, but said not a word, for reproaches angered Alexander.

A week or two later Alexander arranged with some friends for a regular drinking-bout. But on the morning of the day fixed for it he got a note from Julia begging him to be with her the whole day, and come as early as possible. She was ill and unhappy, she wrote, her nerves were in an awful state, and so on. Though irritated, he went to warn her that he could not stay with her, that he had a great deal to do.

"Oh, of course! Dinner with Dumet, the theatre, to-bogganning -most important business," she said mournfully.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked angrily. "I see you have me watched. I'm not going to stand that!"

He rose as if to go.

"Wait, hear me!" she said. "We must have a talk."

"I have no time."

"Just one minute! Sit down."

He sat down grudgingly on the edge of a chair.

Folding her hands she looked at him nervously, as if trying to read in his face the reply to what she was going to say.

He shifted impatiently in his seat.

"Hurry up! I have no time," he said coldly.

She sighed.

"Don't you love me any more?" she asked, shaking her head slightly.

"The old song!" he said, smoothing his hat with the cuff of his coat sleeve.

"And how tired of it you are!" she retorted.

He got up and began rapidly walking up and down the room. A minute later the sound of sobbing was heard.

"It only wanted that!" he said furiously, stopping in front of her. "I suppose you haven't tortured me enough yet!"

"I torture you!" she exclaimed and sobbed still harder.

"This is intolerable!" said Alexander, preparing to go.

"I won't do it any more!" she said hastily, drying her tears. "Look, I'm not crying, only don't go, sit down!"

She tried to smile, while the tears poured down her cheeks. Alexander was touched. He sat down, swinging his foot. He addressed a series of questions to himself, and came to the conclusion that he had cooled, he no longer loved Julia. And why? God alone knew! She loved him more and more every day—was that "Why?" Great heavens—what a paradox! All the conditions for happiness were present. Nothing stood in their way, there was not even another feeling to distract him, and he had cooled. Such is life! But how was he to console Julia? Sacrifice himself? Drag out with her long, tedious days? Pretend? But he was incapable of that, and not to pretend would mean incessant tears, reproaches, torture for her and himself. Expound to her all of a sudden his uncle's theory of deception and the cooling of love? No, thank you! She was crying as it was, what would it be then? What was to be done?

Julia, seeing him silent, took his hand and looked into his eyes. He turned away slowly, gently freeing his hand. Not only did he feel nothing for her—at the touch of her

hand a cold unpleasant tremor passed over him. She redoubled her caresses. He did not respond to them and only became ever colder and grimmer. She suddenly flushed and tore her hand away from him. Feminine pride, wounded vanity, shame, had awakened in her. She held up her head, straightened her back and reddened with anger.

"Leave me!" she jerked out.

He rushed away without the slightest protest. But when the sound of his footsteps began to die away she rushed after him.

"Alexander Fyodorich! Alexander Fyodorich!" she cried.

He turned round.

"Where are you going?"

"You told me yourself to go."

"And you were only too glad to escape! Stay!"

"I have no time."

She took his hand, and once more there was a stream of tender, passionate words, entreaties, tears. Neither by glance, word, nor movement did he display any sympathy, only standing there stiffly, shifting from foot to foot. His imperturbability drove her frantic. Threats and reproaches were showered on him. Impossible to recognize in her the mild woman with the weak nerves! Her curls came tumbling down, her eyes shone with a feverish brilliance, her cheeks blazed, her features were strangely distorted. "How ugly she is!" thought Alexander with a grimace of distaste.

"I will have my revenge!" she cried. "Do you think you can jest so lightly with a woman's fate? You stole into my heart with flattery and hypocrisy, took possession of me completely, and then abandoned me, when I no longer have the strength to forget you. Oh, no, I will not leave you! I will follow you everywhere. You will never

be able to escape from me. If you go to the country—I will follow you, abroad, I shall be there, too, always and everywhere. I shall not give up my happiness so lightly. Nothing matters to me any more. Whatever my life may be.... I have nothing more to lose now. But I will poison yours, too. I will take my revenge. It must be that I have a rival! It cannot be that you would leave me for nothing! I will find her, and you shall see what I will do. You will rue your life! With what satisfaction I should hear of your ruin! I could kill you with my own hands!" she screamed wildly, frantically.

"How idiotic, how ridiculous!" thought Alexander, shrugging his shoulders.

Seeing that threats left Alexander indifferent, she swiftly passed to a gentle mournful tone, and then stood looking at him in silence.

"Have pity on me," she said. "Do not leave me. What shall I do without you now? I shall not survive separation. I shall die. Think—the love of women is different from that of men, it is tenderer, stronger. For women—especially for a woman like me—love is all. Other women may flirt, be fond of society, noise, bustle—I am not used to all this, my nature is different. I love quiet, solitude, books, music but above all else in the world—you."

Alexander showed signs of impatience.

"Good, then do not love me," she went on in animated tones. "But fulfil your promise, marry me, only be with me ... you will be free! Do whatever you like, even love anyone you like, only let me sometimes, every now and then, see you.... Oh, for God's sake, have pity on me, pity!"

She cried and could not go on. Exhausted by her emotions she fell on the sofa, eyes closed, her teeth clenched, her lips convulsively drawn to one side. She was in a



fit of hysterics. An hour later she came to herself, and opened her eyes. Her maid was hovering round her. Julia looked round the room.

"Where—?" she asked.

"Gone."

"Gone!" she echoed forlornly and sat for a long time motionless and silent.

The next day note after note was sent to Alexander, but he neither put in an appearance nor sent any answer. The next two days were the same. Julia wrote to Pyotr Ivanich, asking him to come and see her on important business. His wife she did not like because she was young, pretty, and Alexander's aunt.

Pyotr Ivanich found her ill in real earnest, almost dying. He sat with her for an hour or two, and then set off to see Alexander.

"Oh, what a hypocrite!" he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Alexander.

"And he behaves as if it had nothing to do with him! Says he doesn't know how to win a woman's love, and makes her madly in love with him!"

"I don't understand you, Uncle."

"Oh, don't you? You understand me very well! I've just come from Tafayeva—she told me all."

"What?" muttered Alexander in great confusion. "All?"

"All. How she loves you! Happy man! Well now, you kept moaning that you could not find passion anywhere. And here's passion for you, so cheer up! She's going mad, wild with jealousy, weeping, frantic.... But why did you mix me up in your affairs? You've begun foisting women on to me. It only wanted that. I wasted a whole morning on her. I thought it was about business, I supposed she wanted to mortgage her estate in the Trustee-ship Council or something. She said something about

it once ... and look what it was she wanted me for! Is that business?"

"Why did you go to her?"

"She sent for me to complain of you. And really you ought to be ashamed of neglecting her like that. Stayed away four whole days—that's no joke! She is dying, poor thing. Go—go and see her at once."

"What did you say to her?"

"Nothing special—that you, too, love her madly, that you have long sought a tender heart, that you positively adore 'sincere effusions,' and cannot live without love. I told her not to worry—you'd come back to her; I advised her not to be too strict with you, to let you have your fling every now and then ... otherwise, I said, you'll get tired of each other ... just the usual thing people say in such cases. She quite cheered up and began chattering about your wedding, and told me my wife had taken an interest in it. And not a word to me from either of you! Well, never mind—good luck to you! This one at least has something—enough for the two of you. I told her you would certainly keep your promise.... I did my best for you, Alexander, in gratitude for the service you did for me. I assured her that you loved her *ardently, so dearly—*"

"What have you done, Uncle!" exclaimed Alexander, his face expressing horror. "I—I don't love her any more ... I don't want to marry ... I'm as cold as ice to her. I'd rather take a header into the river than—"

"Heigh-ho!" said Pyotr Ivanich with affected astonishment. "Can this be you? Didn't you say—remember?—that you despised human nature, especially female human nature? That there was not a heart in the world worthy of yours? What else was it you said? Let me see—"

"No more, Uncle, for God's sake! Reproaches are quite enough. Why moralize as well? D'you think I don't understand? Oh, man, man!"

Alexander suddenly began to laugh, and his uncle laughed with him.

"Come, that's better," said Pyotr Ivanich. "I told you you would be laughing at yourself one day—and here you are!"

And again they both laughed heartily.

"Come now, tell me," continued Pyotr Ivanich. "What do you think of that ... what's her name ... Pashenka, isn't it—with the wart?"

"Uncle, that's ungenerous!"

"I only wanted to know if you still despised her."

"For God's sake don't talk about that! Just help me to get out of the appalling situation I am in. You're so clever, so rational."

"Ah, compliments, flattery, now! No, you must get married this time."

"Not for the world, Uncle! Help me, I implore you!"

"Aha, Alexander! A good thing I've known for a long time what you were up to!"

"A long time!"

"Oh, yes! I've known of this from the very beginning."

"I suppose *ma tante* told you."

"Not a bit of it! I told her! Nothing special in that! I could read it all in your face. Never mind, never mind! I have done what I could to help you."

"What? When?"

"This very morning! Don't worry! Tafayeva will never bother you any more."

"What did you do? What did you say to her?"

"It would take a long time to tell you, Alexander, it would be a bore."

"But who knows what you told her! She will hate, despise me!"

"Why should you care? I consoled her—and let that suffice. I told her you were incapable of loving, that you weren't worth troubling about."

"And what did she say?"

"Now she's glad you have left her."

"Glad!" said Alexander thoughtfully.

"Yes, glad."

"You saw no signs of regret or melancholy in her? She doesn't care? How can it be?"

He began pacing the floor nervously.

"Glad! Calm!" he repeated. "What do you think of that? I'll go to her this minute."

"Human beings all over!" remarked Pyotr Ivanich. "The human heart all over! Live by it—what a fine thing that would be! Didn't you tell me you were afraid she would send for you? Didn't you ask for help? And now you're upset because she doesn't die of grief at the separation from you."

"Glad, pleased!" said Alexander, pacing up and down and not heeding his uncle's words. "So she never really loved me! No grief, not a tear! I must see her."

Pyotr Ivanich shrugged his shoulders.

"Say what you will, I can't leave it at that, Uncle!" added Alexander, picking up his hat.

"All right—go to her! But you'll never get away from her again, and don't come begging me for help! I shan't interfere any more! I only did so this time because it was I who got you into this situation. What! Still looking glum?"

"Life is a shameful thing!" said Alexander, sighing.

"Unless one finds real work to do," interposed his uncle. "Enough! Come and see us today! We'll laugh about your affair over dinner, and then we'll drive to the works."

"How insignificant, how worthless I am!" said Alexander ruefully. "I have no heart! I am pitiable, a bankrupt soul!"

"And all because of love," interrupted Pyotr Ivanich. "A foolish occupation—leave it to people like Surkov! You are a clever chap, you could occupy yourself with more important things. You've done enough running after women."

"But you love your wife, don't you?"

"Of course I do! I'm deeply attached to her, but that does not prevent me from going about my business in life. Well, good-bye. Come and see us soon!"

Alexander sat on, confused and morose. Yevsei stole into the room, his forearm thrust into a boot.

"Look, Sir!" he said ecstatically. "What splendid boot polish! You can get a surface on it like glass and it only costs twenty-five kopeks."

Alexander roused himself, and looked blankly from the boot to Yevsei.

"Get out!" he said. "You're a fool!"

"Then why don't you send me back to the village?" said Yevsei.

"Get out, I tell you!" shouted Alexander, almost in tears. "You're worrying me to death, you'll drive me to the grave with your boots ... you ... savage!"

Yevsei retreated hastily to the hall.

#### IV

"Why doesn't Alexander ever come? I haven't seen him for three months," Pyotr Ivanich asked his wife one day, on his return from work.

"I have quite lost hope of ever seeing him again," she replied.

"I wonder what's the matter with him? In love again, perhaps!"

"I have no idea."

"Is he well?"

"I suppose so!"

"Write to him, I want to speak to him. There have been changes at the office again, and I suppose he knows nothing about it. I can't understand such carelessness."

"I've written to him again and again, and invited him here. He says he has no time, but he's always playing draughts or going fishing with a queer set of people. Better go and see him yourself! You could find out what's the matter."

"I don't feel like it. Send a servant."

"Alexander won't come."

"We'll try."

They sent a servant, who soon came back.

"Well—was he in?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"Yes, Sir. He sent his respects."

"What's he doing?"

"Lying on the sofa."

"What, at this time of day?"

"They say he lies on the sofa all day long."

"What does he do—sleep?"

"No, Sir! At first I thought he was asleep but his eyes were open, and he was staring at the ceiling."

Pyotr Ivanich shrugged his shoulders.

"Is he coming?" he asked.

"No, Sir. 'My respects to my uncle,' he says, 'and tell him to excuse me. I'm not feeling quite well,' and he sent his respects to you, Ma'am."

"Now what's the matter with him? It's really astonishing. Strange chap! Tell them not to unharness the

horses. There's nothing for it but to go to him. But this really is the last time."

Pyotr Ivanich, too, found Alexander on the sofa. He rose to a sitting position when his uncle came in.

"Aren't you well?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"Not quite," said Alexander with a yawn.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

"And can you live without doing anything?"

"I can."

"Listen, Alexander—I heard today that Ivanov in your office is leaving."

"Yes, he is."

"And who will get his place?"

"Ichenko, they say."

"And what about you?"

"Me? Nothing."

"What d'you mean, nothing? Why shouldn't you get the place?"

"I have not been honoured. Can't be helped! I suppose I'm not considered worthy."

"But, Alexander, you must do something! Why not go to the director?"

"I won't," said Alexander, shaking his head.

"You don't seem to care one way or another."

"Not a bit!"

"But this will be the third time you have been passed over."

"I don't care! Let them!"

"We'll see what you say when your former subordinate starts giving you orders, or when you have to get up and bow when he comes in."

"Very well, then! I'll get up and bow."



"And what about your pride?"

"I haven't any."

"But I suppose you have some interests in life?"

"None whatever! I used to, but not any more."

"That's impossible—one interest takes the place of another. And how is it that you have lost yours, while others keep theirs? It's early days for that—you're not thirty yet."

Alexander shrugged his shoulders.

Pyotr Ivanich saw no point in continuing the conversation. He put everything down to mere whim, but he knew that when he got home he would be unable to evade his wife's questions, and therefore he reluctantly pursued the subject.

"Why don't you seek distraction, go out into society?" he said. "Or you could read."

"No desire, Uncle!"

"People are beginning to talk about you, they say you've ... er ... gone off your head from love, that you're up to all sorts of things, hobnobbing with a queer set.... That alone would make me go and see people."

"They can say what they like!"

"Listen, Alexander, joking apart—all that's a mere trifle! You can bow, or not bow, go out into society or not—that's not the point. But remember that, like everyone else, you have a career to make. Do you ever think about that?"

"I do! I've made it already."

"What d'you mean?"

"I have outlined a course of action and do not wish to go beyond its limits. Here, I am master—that's my career."

"That's just laziness."

"Perhaps."

"You have no right to lounge about, when there are things you could do, while you have the strength. Is your work all done?"

"But I do work. No one can reproach me with idleness. I go to the office in the mornings, and to do any more than that would be a luxury—superfluous zeal. Why should I take the trouble?"

"Everyone takes trouble about something or other. Some because they consider it their duty to work while they have the strength, some for money, some for rank. Why should you be an exception?"

"Rank? Money? Especially money! What's the good of it? I have enough to eat, I am clothed—there's enough for that."

"And very badly dressed you are," remarked his uncle. "Besides that's not all you need!"

"That's all."

"And the luxury of mental and spiritual enjoyments, and art," said Pyotr Ivanich, imitating Alexander's way of speaking. "You are capable of developing. Your vocation is higher. Your duty summons you to noble toil.... And strivings towards the highest—have you forgotten?"

"The deuce take them, the deuce take them!" said Alexander restlessly. "And you, too, Uncle, have begun speaking wildly. You used not to do that. You're putting it on for my sake, I suppose. Vain efforts. I used to strive for the highest—you remember? And what came of it?"

"I remember you wanted to become a minister straight away, and then a writer. But when you saw that the road to a high office is long and hard, and that a writer needs talent, you beat a retreat. Many fellows like you come here with lofty ideas, but are unable to see what lies

beneath their nose. As soon as it becomes a matter of office drudgery they take one look and are off. I'm not talking about you, you have shown that you know how to work, and could, in time, become a somebody. But this is tedious, it takes a long time. We want everything all at once. When it doesn't come off, we fall into dejection."

"But I have no ambition for a high post. I want to stay where I am. Haven't I the right to choose my own occupation? What does it matter whether it's beneath my abilities or not? So long as I do my work conscientiously, I am doing my duty. Let them reproach me for inability to do any more, I shouldn't care a bit even if it were true. You said yourself there was poetry in a modest lot, and now you reproach me for having chosen the most modest possible. What is to prevent me from descending a few steps lower still, and staying at the level that pleases me? I do not wish for a higher post—I do not wish for it, d'you hear me?"

"I hear you. I'm not deaf, but these are all pitiable sophisms."

"What do I care? I've found myself a place and will stay in it to the end. I have found simple, unsophisticated people, they may not be very clever, and a good thing, too! I play draughts with them and go fishing. What if, according to your ideas, I am punished for that, giving up rewards, money, rank, distinction, all that is so dear to you? I renounce them ever once and for all."

"You pretend to be calm and indifferent to everything, but your words are a cover for raging resentment. Your speech is not words, but tears. There is much spleen in you. You do not know whom to vent it on, for you alone are to blame."

"Amen," said Alexander.

"What d'you want? A man must want something."

"I want to be left alone in my obscure corner, to strive for nothing, and to be at peace."

"But that's not life!"

"And I don't consider the life you lead is life, either. So you see I, too, must be right."

"You want to shape your life according to your own ideas. I can just imagine how nice it would be! I suppose in your sort of world lovers and friends would stray in couples among rose bushes."

Alexander said nothing.

Pyotr Ivanich looked at him in silence. He had grown thin again. His eyes were sunken. Premature wrinkles had appeared on his cheeks and forehead.

His uncle was alarmed. Not one to put much faith in spiritual sufferings, he feared that some physical indisposition was at the bottom of this depression. "The fellow may break down," he thought, "and then I shall have to tell his mother. There would be a correspondence! Before you knew where you were she'd be turning up here!"

"You're disillusioned, Alexander," he said. "I can see that."

"How can he be led back to his favourite ideas?" he thought. "Wait, I'll have a try."

"Listen, Alexander," he said. "You've let yourself go terribly. Shake off this apathy! It's not right! And what's the reason of it? Perhaps you took it too much to heart when I sometimes spoke slightly of love and friendship. I was only joking, you know, chiefly to moderate your enthusiasm which somehow doesn't belong to our practical age, especially here in Petersburg, where everything is regulated—fashions, feelings, business, pleasures, where everything is weighed, studied, appraised

... where limits are set to everything. Why be the only one to outwardly infringe these universal laws? Surely you do not really consider that I am callous, that I do not acknowledge the power of love! Love is an exquisite emotion. There is nothing more sacred than the union of two hearts, or take friendship, now.... I am inwardly convinced that feeling should be constant, eternal."

Alexander laughed.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"You're talking nonsense, Uncle! Won't you have a cigar? You can go on talking and I'll listen."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. You thought you would touch me. And you once told me you thought me no fool. You want to play with me as if I were a ball, and that hurts. One can't be a youth for ever. The school I have been through has at least taught me that much. And you start haranguing me. D'you think I have no eyes? You thought you would do a little conjuring, but I saw through you."

"This is not for me," thought Pyotr Ivanich. "I'd better send him to my wife."

"Come and see us," he said. "My wife is longing to see you."

"Sorry, Uncle, I can't."

"D'you think it's nice of you to forget her?"

"It may be very bad, but for God's sake, excuse me, and don't expect me to come just now. Wait a little longer—I'll come."

"Well, just as you like," said Pyotr Ivanich. He dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand and went home.

He told his wife that he had given Alexander up—let him do what he likes, he, Pyotr Ivanich, had done all he could, and now he washed his hands of him.

Alexander, after running away from Julia, plunged

into the whirlwind of noisy pleasures. In the words of our well-known poet, he exclaimed:

*Away, to where joy reigns supreme,  
Where vain delights fill all of life,  
Where song and mirth flow in a stream,  
Where festive gaiety runs rife.  
In this false happiness engrossed,  
I'll grow as commonplace as most,  
And reconciled to fate by wine,  
I will not let my heart repine,  
I'll bid my thoughts to cease their flights,  
I will not let my yearning eyes  
Look at the shining heavenly heights.*

A host of friends appeared, and with them the inevitable *goblet*. The friends gazed at their own countenances reflected in the foamy liquid, and in their polished boots. "Away with grief!" they cried ecstatically. "Away with cares! We will spend our substance, destroy, lay waste, drink away our life and our youth! Hurrah!" Glasses and bottles crashed against the floor.

For a short time liberty, noisy company, carefree life made him forget Julia and melancholy. But not for him was the monotonous round of restaurant dinners, the same dull-eyed countenances, the same daily foolish, drunken ravings of boon companions, and, to crown all, the same perpetual indigestion. Alexander's delicate physique and nervous system, tuned to a melancholy, minor mood, could not stand these amusements.

He forsook the merry games at the cheerful board, and took to his room, alone with himself, with his forgotten books. But the book slipped from his hands, the pen would not obey inspiration. Schiller, Goethe, Byron had shown him the dark side of humanity—the bright side he had not noticed, he had been too busy for that.

How happy he had once been in this room! He had not been alone—a bright vision had hovered about him, sheltering him during the day's earnest toil, keeping watch over his pillow at night. Then dreams had been his companions, his future had been shrouded in mist, not the dense mist which is the precursor of bad weather, but that of early morn, veiling the bright sunrise. There had been a secret something concealed behind this mist—happiness, no doubt.... And now? Not only his room, but the whole world had become empty, and within him were only coldness and melancholy.

He inspected his life, questioned his heart, his head, and was appalled to discover that not a single dream, not a single rosy hope was left anywhere—all that was behind him. The mists had dispersed, and he was confronted, as by a desert, by naked reality. Heavens, what boundless space! What a dull, joyless prospect! The past had perished, the future was destroyed, there was no such thing as happiness. All was chaos—and yet one must go on living.

He did not know himself what he wanted—but there was so much that he did not want!

His head seemed to be in a mist. He did not sleep, but dwelt in a kind of trance. Gloomy thoughts chased one another across his mind. He asked himself what was left for him to take an interest in; captivating hopes, carefree moods, no longer existed. He knew all that the future held for him. Honour, the strivings of ambition? What had they to do with him? Was it worth struggling against obstacles just for the sake of some twenty or thirty years? And would all this warm his heart? Would his soul rejoice when a few persons bowed low to him, at the same time probably thinking to themselves: "The devil take you!"



Love? Nothing new in that! He knew it by heart, and anyhow he had lost the ability to love. His memory, as if to mock him, assiduously reminded him of Nadenka, not the innocent, naïve Nadenka—her he never remembered—but always the treacherous Nadenka, with her whole background, the trees, the garden path, the flowers, and, in the midst of all, this serpent, with the well-known smile, the flush of tenderness and shame ... and all for another, not for him.... He clutched at his heart with a groan.

"Friendship," thought he, "yet another folly! Everything is known, there is nothing new, the past will never return, and yet you must go on living!"

He believed in no one and nothing, could not lose himself in pleasure, which he tasted as a man with no appetite tastes some favourite dish, coldly, fully aware that afterwards would come boredom, that there was nothing to fill the empty places of his soul with. If one believed in feeling, it deceived one, roused one needlessly, and added a few more wounds to those already existing. When he saw people united by love, in ecstasies of joy, he would smile sarcastically and think to himself: "Wait a bit! You'll come to your senses! After the first joys begin jealousy, scenes of reconciliation, tears! If you live together, you will bore each other to death, and if you part, your tears will be redoubled. You will come together again, and that will be still worse. Insensate beings! Perpetually quarrelling, sulking, jealous, reconciled for a moment, only to quarrel still more violently! That's what their love, their devotion comes to! They foam at the mouth, stubbornly, sometimes with frantic tears, calling this happiness! And the thing they call friendship.... Throw them a bone, and they will be your faithful curs...."

He was afraid to wish for anything, knowing how often, at the very moment of the fulfilment of desire, fate

wrenches happiness out of our hands and offers something quite different, something we never desired—some spurious trifle. And even if fate does bestow on us what we wished for, it is only after torturing us, wearing us out, humiliating us in our own eyes, and then flinging us a bone as if we were dogs, who are made to crawl up to the titbit, to look at it, to balance it on their noses, to roll in the dust, to stand on their hind legs, till they hear the word, "Paid for!"

The periodical alternations of happiness and woe in life alarmed him. He foresaw no joy, nothing but sorrow ahead, inevitable sorrow. All are subject to the same law, all, it seemed to him, receive an equal share of joy and sorrow. His portion of happiness was over, and what had it been? A will o'the wisp, deception. Grief alone was real, and it lay ahead. The future held sickness and age and all sorts of losses, perhaps even need. All these *blows of fate*, as his aunt in the country called them, were lying in wait for him—and what joys would there be? His lofty poetical vocation had failed him, a heavy burden had been imposed on him, and given the name of duty. Nothing but the most despicable benefit remained—money, comforts, rank.... The devil take them! Oh, how sad to have seen through life, to have realized what it is, but not to know what it is for!

And he indulged in his spleen, seeing no escape from the slough of these doubts. Experience had only exhausted him, had failed to increase his vitality, to cleanse the atmosphere, to give him light. He was at the end of his tether. He tossed and turned on the sofa, going over in his mind the names of his friends, and falling still deeper into dejection. This one was doing very well at his office, and enjoyed respect and fame as an efficient official, another had a growing family and preferred a quiet life

to all vain worldly blessings, envying no man, desiring nothing. Yet another ... but why go on? They had all succeeded and were proceeding along the well-beaten, well-planned, trodden path they had chosen. "I alone ... ah, what am I?"

Here he began to delve into himself—was he capable of leading, of commanding a squadron? Could he be content with family life? And he realized that none of these things could have satisfied him. Some imp stirred restlessly within him the whole time, ever whispering to him that all this was below him, that he ought to aim higher ... but where and how he could not make up his mind. He had been mistaken as to his literary talents. "What am I to do? How am I to begin?" he asked himself, and knew not how to answer. And he was perpetually pestered by a voice which told him he might still be a leader or the commander of a squadron ... but no, it was too late, it would mean beginning all over again.

Despair wrung tears from his eyes—tears of vexation, envy, ill-will to all, tears of anguish. He bitterly repented not having listened to his mother, and stayed at home in obscurity.

"Mamma foresaw my sufferings instinctively," he thought. "At home, all these restless impulses would have remained sound asleep. There would not have been this complex, seething life. And while all the human feelings and passions—vanity, pride, ambition—would have visited me there, too, it would have been to an infinitely lesser degree, within the narrow confines of our district, and all these feelings would have been satisfied. To be first in the district! Yes, everything is relative. The divine spark from the heavenly fire, which to a certain extent burns within us all, would have shone mildly in me and soon have been extinguished in that idle life, or would

have flamed in devotion to wife and children. My existence would not have been poisoned. I would have pursued my vocation proudly. My path in life would have been peaceful, would have seemed simple and comprehensible, life would not have been beyond my powers, I would have endured the daily struggle.... And love? It would have become a luxuriant blossom and filled my whole life. Sophia would have loved me in that stillness. I would not have lost my faith in anything, I would have plucked nothing but roses, never have felt the thorns, I would not have known jealousy, for lack of competition. What drew me with such blind force to remote misty parts, to the unequal and unfamiliar struggle with fate? And how well I then understood life and human beings! I would still be understanding them as I then did, that is to say, not understanding them. I expected so much from life and if I had not seen it so close, I would to this day be expecting something. What treasures I discovered in my own soul—where are they all? I have exchanged them for the world's coin, given my frankness, my first passion—and for what? For bitter disillusionment, for the knowledge that all is deception, all is brittle, that one can place trust neither in oneself nor in others—and I have come to fear both others and myself. I have not been able, along with this analysis, to accept the trifles of life and be content with them, as my uncle and many others do. And now—”

Now he desired only one thing—oblivion to the past, peace, the slumber of the soul. He grew colder and colder towards life, surveyed all with drowsy eyes. The crowd of humanity, the noise of festivities held only tedium for him, he fled them, but tedium pursued him.

He wondered how people could make merry, be eternally occupied, be carried away by new interests every day. He was surprised that everyone did not go about

drowsy-eyed and weeping, like himself, and, instead of prattling about the weather, speak of grief and sufferings, or that, if they did speak of suffering, it was only about pains in their legs or elsewhere, about their rheumatism or their piles. The body alone was the subject of their care, they never so much as thought of their souls. "Trivial, worthless beings, animals!" he thought. And sometimes he would be plunged in profound meditation. "There are so many of them, those worthless beings," he would say to himself with a certain anxiety. "And I am alone.... Can it be that all these ... empty beings ... are wrong ... and I—?"

Here he would begin to feel that he alone was to blame, and this made him more unhappy than ever.

He stopped seeing his old acquaintances, and the approach of a new one made him shudder. After his conversation with his uncle he sank still deeper into apathy, and his soul was bathed in drowsiness. He gave himself up to a kind of stupefied indifference, living in idleness, stubbornly isolating himself from anything which might be reminiscent of the educated world.

"What does it matter how one lives, so long as one does live?" he asked himself. "Everyone has the right to interpret life in his own way. And when one comes to die—"

He sought converse with those whose minds were jaundiced and embittered, whose hearts were hard, only unburdening himself when he heard jeering remarks about fate. Or he spent his time with persons not his equals either in mind or education, chiefly with that old Kostyakov, whom Zayezhalov had wished to introduce to Pyotr Ivanich.

Kostyakov lived in Peskee, went about in a cap with a varnished peak and a dressing-gown belted with a handkerchief. He played cards with his cook of an evening. If

a fire broke out anywhere, he was the first to turn up and the last to leave. If he passed a church in which a funeral service was being held, he would squeeze through the crowd to have a look at the dead man's face, and later would follow the coffin to the cemetery. He was a passionate lover of ritual of all sorts, both gay and sad. He liked, too, to be present at various emergencies, such as fights, fatal accidents, the caving-in of ceilings, and so on, and would read with gusto newspaper reports of such events. In addition to this he read books on medicine, in order, he said, to know what there is in a man. In the winter Alexander played draughts with him, and in the summer went fishing with him. The old man would chat of one thing and another—the harvest, the sowing if they happened to be crossing a field, fish and shipping when they came to the river. In the streets he would make remarks on houses, building materials and profits—never anything abstract. He regarded life as a fine thing when one had money, quite the opposite when one hadn't. A man like that was no danger to Alexander, and could not arouse spiritual agitation.

Alexander tried to kill the spiritual principle in himself as assiduously as hermits try to kill the flesh. At the office he was taciturn, limiting himself to a word or two when he met an acquaintance, and soon beating a retreat, saying he was in a hurry. But his friend Kostyakov he met every day. The old man either sat in Alexander's room all day, or invited Aduyev to share his dinner of cabbage soup. He taught Alexander how to brew cordials, and make delicious fish and meat stews. They would sometimes go together to the country, to some village in the vicinity. Kostyakov had a host of acquaintances everywhere. He talked to the peasants about their daily life, and joked with the women, showing himself



to be really the chatterbox Zayezhalov had called him. Alexander let him run on as much as he liked, but spoke very little himself.

Thoughts of the world he had abandoned came to him with ever less frequency and intensity, and, finding no reflection in his surroundings, did not reach his tongue, but died away, still-born. Within him all was wildness and devastation, as in a neglected garden. A little more and he would have been in a state of complete petrification. A few more months, and all would have been over. But then something happened.

One day Alexander and Kostyakov were fishing as usual. Kostyakov, in a robe and a leather cap, deposited on the bank several fishing-rods of various dimensions, lines for deep fishing, some with floats, some with little bells, attached to them. He smoked his short pipe, and keeping a watchful eye on this battery of rods, among which was Alexander's, too, for Alexander was leaning against a tree and looking away. They stood in silence for a long time.

"You have a bite, Alexander Fyodorich!" whispered Kostyakov suddenly.

Alexander glanced at the water and turned away again.

"It's only a ripple," he said.

"Look, look!" cried Kostyakov. "A bite—it *is* a bite! Oh, oh—get it, hold it!"

And indeed the float plunged into the water, the line was jerked after it, and with the line, the rod, which had been stuck in a bush. Alexander seized the rod and then the line.

"Steady, not too hard, not like that—what are you doing?" cried Kostyakov, pulling at the line eagerly. "My, my! What a weight—don't tug! Careful, it might



snap! That's the way—right, left—this way, on to the bank! Step back! Further! Now pull, pull, but don't jerk! That's the way! That's the way!"

A huge pike appeared on the surface of the water. It whirled round and round, its silvery scales gleaming, its tail lashing from right to left, splashing them both. Kostyakov turned pale.

"There's a pike for you!" he cried in something almost like alarm, and leaning over the water with outspread arms he fell down, stumbling over his rods, catching at the writhing pike in both hands. "Come on, on to the bank, there—further back! We'll get it, it won't wriggle away! Look how it wriggles—what a devil! What a creature! Oh!"

"Oh!" repeated a voice from behind them.

Alexander turned. Two paces away from them stood an old man leaning on the arm of a tall, pretty girl, with her head uncovered and a parasol in her hands. Frowning ever so slightly, she bent forward, following Kostyakov's every movement with evident sympathy. She did not even notice Alexander.

The unexpected apparition embarrassed him. He dropped the rod, the pike fell heavily into the water, waving its tail gracefully, and plunged into the depths, taking the line with it. It all happened in the twinkling of an eye.

"Alexander Fyodorich, what have you done?" shouted Kostyakov frantically, seizing the line. He tugged at it but it came out of the water minus both hook and pike. Pale as death, he turned to Alexander, showing him the end of the line, and glaring at him furiously for the space of a minute. Then he spat.

"I'll be damned if I ever go fishing with you again!" he declared, and moved towards his own rods.

Just then the girl, noticing that Alexander was looking at her, blushed and retreated a step. The old man, evidently her father, bowed to Alexander. Alexander returned the bow morosely, threw down his rod, and went to sit on a bench beneath a tree, some ten paces away.

"Even here there is no peace," he said to himself. "An Oedipus and an Antigone! Again a woman! No getting away from them! Heavens—what a lot of them there are everywhere!"

"A fine fisherman you are!" Kostyakov said, fidgeting with his rods, and darting resentful glances at Alexander. "You can't catch fish! You ought to catch mice, sitting on your sofa! And you go fishing! How can you catch it if you let it go? It almost jumped into your mouth, it only wanted frying! I'm surprised they don't get away when they're on your plate."

"Are they biting?" the old man asked.

"Look!" replied Kostyakov. "Not a miserable minnow so much as nibbles at one of my six rods! And look what Alexander got from the floats—a ten-pound pike and he let it go! They say the prey runs to meet a good hunter. But is it true? If it had got away from me, I'd have taken it out of the water myself. And here was a pike fairly jumping into our mouths, and we go to sleep—and call ourselves fishermen! Fishermen! Call yourself a fisherman? Why, a proper fisherman wouldn't turn a hair if a gun were to go off beside him! Fishermen! How can you catch fish!"

By this time the girl had discovered that Alexander was quite a different sort of person from Kostyakov. His clothes, his figure, his age, his manners, everything about him was different. She swiftly recognized in him the signs of breeding and read thought in his face. Even the shade of melancholy did not escape her.

"What made him run away?" she wondered. "Funny, I don't think I'm the sort people run away from."

Drawing herself up proudly, she lowered her eyelids, then raised them, darting a hostile glance at Alexander.

She was quite vexed. Drawing her father away she passed Alexander with a majestic mien. The old man bowed to him again, but his daughter did not even deign to look at him.

"Let him see nobody is thinking about him!" she said to herself, stealing a furtive glance to see if he was looking at her.

Alexander, though he did not look at her, could not help assuming a picturesque pose.

"Fancy—he doesn't even look!" thought the girl. "What insolence!"

The next day Kostyakov came to fetch Alexander to go fishing again, in spite of his curses of the day before.

For two days no one disturbed their solitude. At first Alexander looked around him as if in fear, but, seeing no one, calmed down. The next day he caught a huge perch. Kostyakov was half reconciled to him.

"Still, it's not a pike," he sighed. "You had happiness in your grasp and could not profit by it. Such things don't happen twice! And again I have nothing! Six rods—and nothing!"

"Ring your bells," said a peasant, pausing on his way to see how the fishing was going. "Perhaps the fish will hear the ringing, and ... bite, you know."

Kostyakov looked at him angrily.

"You be quiet, you ignorant thing!" he said. "Muzhik!"

The peasant moved on.

"Blockhead!" shouted Kostyakov after him. "Beast that you are! Joke with your own kind, damn you! Beast, I tell you! Muzhik!"

Woe to him who irritates a sportsman in the moment of failure!

On the following day as they were silently watching their rods, gazing fixedly at the water, a rustle was heard from behind. Alexander turned and started as if he had been bitten by a gnat. There were the old man and the girl again.

Alexander looked at them askance, hardly replying to the old man's bow, but he seemed to have expected this visit. As a rule he went fishing very carelessly attired, but today he had put on a new coat and tied a sky-blue kerchief round his neck with a coquettish air, his hair was combed, perhaps ever so slightly waved, and he looked like a fisherman in an idyll. He waited a short time, for the sake of decency, and again went to sit under the tree.

*"Cela passe toute permission!"* thought Antigone, reddening angrily.

"Excuse me," said Oedipus to Alexander, "perhaps we're in your way?"

"No," said Alexander. "I'm only tired."

"Any bites?" the old man asked Kostyakov.

"Bites, with talking going on so near!" replied the latter crossly. "Just now some goblin passed by and had to stop and talk, and ever since—not a bite! I suppose you live somewhere near?" he asked Oedipus.

"That's our house, the one with the balcony," replied the latter.

"Do you pay much for it?"

"Five hundred rubles for the summer."

"Looks like a nice house, in good repair, and plenty of outhouses. Probably cost the owner about thirty thousand."

"About that."

"I thought so. And is that your daughter?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Nice young lady! Taking a walk?"

"Yes, taking a walk. If you live in the country you must go for walks."

"True, true, why not go for walks? The weather's good, not like it was last week. What weather—oh my, dear God! The winter crops must have suffered."

"With the Lord's help they will recover."

"Amen."

"So you have no catch today."

"I haven't, but he has—look there!"

He pointed to the perch.

"I tell you it's a marvel what luck he has! A pity he doesn't give his mind to it, with his luck we'd never go home empty-handed. To let a pike like that go!"

He sighed.

Antigone began listening more attentively, but Kostyakov said no more.

The old man and his daughter came more and more frequently. Even Alexander deigned to bestow his attention on them. He sometimes actually exchanged a few words with the old man, but never with his daughter. At first she was annoyed, then she was offended, and at last she was grieved. If Alexander had spoken to her, or even paid her the usual attentions, she would have thought no more of him. As it was, everything was different. The human heart, it would appear, lives on contradiction—if it were not for that, one might suppose there was no such thing in the breast.

At first Antigone tried to think out some terrible plan of revenge, but gradually gave up the idea.

One day when the old man and his daughter came up to our friends, Alexander, after waiting a little while, rested his rod against a bush and repaired as usual to his place, glancing involuntarily from father to daughter.

They were standing with their profiles turned towards him. In the father he could see nothing special. A white shirt, nankeen trousers and a low hat with a broad brim, lined with green plush. But the daughter! How gracefully she leaned on the old man's arm! Every now and then the breeze stirred a curl against her cheek, as if to give Alexander a view of her exquisite profile and white neck, blew open her silk pelisse exposing her slender figure, or lifted the hem of her dress, so that her slim ankles could be seen. She gazed pensively at the water.

For a long time Alexander could not take his eyes off her, and felt a feverish tremor pass through his frame. He turned away from temptation and began cutting off the heads of flowers with a stick.

"I know all about it," he told himself, "only let myself go, and everything will start all over again! And the next thing will be love—what madness! My uncle is right. But I am not to be led away by mere animal lust—I shall not sink so low as that."

"May I fish?" the girl was shyly asking Kostyakov.

"Why, yes, Miss—certainly!" he replied, giving her Alexander's rod.

"Well, now you have a companion," her father said to Kostyakov, and went off to wander along the bank without his daughter.

"Mind you catch some fish for supper, Liza!" he called. For some moments silence reigned.

"Why is your friend so sulky?" Liza asked Kostyakov in a low voice.

"He's been passed over three times, Miss."

"What?" she asked, her brows twitching.

"Why, you see, three times they haven't given him promotion."

She shook her head.

"It couldn't be that," she thought to herself. "Not that."

"You don't believe me, Miss? May God strike me dead! And that's why he let the pike go that time—remember?"

"It couldn't be that," she said to herself with conviction. "I know why he let the pike go."

"Oh, oh," she screamed suddenly. "Look, it's moving, it's moving."

She pulled up the rod, but there was nothing at the end of the line.

"Got away," said Kostyakov, looking at the rod. "See—it took the worm! Must have been a big perch. You don't know how to fish, Miss, you should have waited for it to bite properly."

"And does one have to know how to fish?"

"Like everything else," said Alexander involuntarily.

She blushed, turning sharply, and letting the rod fall into the water. But Alexander was looking away again.

"And how can one learn?" she said, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"By practice," replied Alexander.

"Aha!" thought she, secretly thrilled. "That is to say, come here more often—I understand! Good, I will, but I will torment you, Mr. Savage, for all your insolence."

It was thus that her coquetry interpreted Alexander's reply, but that day he said not another word.

"She will be imagining heaven knows what," he said to himself. "Soon she'll be putting on airs and flirting—idiotic!"

From this occasion the visits of the old man and the girl were repeated daily. Sometimes Liza came without the old man, accompanied by a nurse. She would bring her needlework, or a book, and sit down under a tree, displaying the utmost indifference to the presence of Alexander.



She thought in this way to wound his pride and, as she had said, *torment* him. She talked to the nurse about the house, and household affairs, to show that she did not even see Alexander. Sometimes he really did not notice her, or if he did, greeted her coldly, with hardly a word.

Seeing that this banal manoeuvre got her nowhere, she changed her plan of attack and once or twice addressed him herself. Sometimes she took his fishing-rod from him. Gradually Alexander began to be more communicative, but he was extremely cautious and did not let a single cordial word slip from him. Whether this was strategy on his part, or whether, as he said, his former wounds were still unhealed, he was sufficiently cold in his converse with her.

One day the old man ordered a samovar to be brought to the river-bank. Liza poured out tea. Alexander glumly refused to drink, saying he never took tea in the evening.

"All this tea-drinking ends in ... making friends... I won't have it!" he told himself.

"What? You drank four glasses last night," said Kostyakov.

"I never drink out of doors," added Alexander hastily.

"Too bad!" said Kostyakov. "It's delicious tea, herb-tea, probably cost fifteen rubles or so. Another glass, please, Miss, and it would be nice with a drop of rum."

Rum, too, was brought.

The old man invited Alexander to his house, but met with a firm refusal. When Liza heard this refusal, she pouted, and began trying to find out from him the reason of his unsociability. But cunningly as she led the conversation to this subject, Alexander evaded it still **more** cunningly.

The mystery merely stimulated the curiosity and perhaps some other feeling in Liza. On her countenance, hitherto as clear as a summer sky, there appeared clouds of anxiety and care. She often fixed a mournful gaze on Alexander, and then looked away with a sigh, lowering her eyes, as if thinking: "You are unhappy, perhaps you have been deceived.... Oh, how happy I would make you! How I would look after you, love you ... I would protect you from fate itself, I would—" and so on and so on.

Thus argue the majority of women and thus do they allure those who listen to their siren song. Alexander appeared to notice nothing. He spoke to her as he would have spoken to a man-friend, or to his uncle. There was not a shade of that tenderness which creeps unconsciously into the friendship of men and women and makes their relations something different from friendship. That is why it is said that there can never be friendship between men and women, that so-called friendship between them is nothing but either the beginning or the remains of love, or, perhaps, love itself. To see Adnyev and Liza, however, one might have believed in the existence of such friendship.

Only once did he partially reveal to her, or begin to reveal to her the course of his thoughts. He picked up from the bench the book she had brought, and opened it. It was *Childe Harold* in a French translation. Alexander shook his head, sighed, and silently put the book down.

"Don't you like Byron? Are you against Byron?" she asked. "You don't like a great poet like Byron?"

"I didn't say a word, and you attack me!" he said.

"Why did you shake your head?"

"Oh, I was only sorry that you should have got hold of this book."

"Whom were you sorry for—the book or me?"

Alexander made no reply.

"Why shouldn't I read Byron?" she asked.

"For two reasons," said Alexander after a pause.

He placed his hand on hers, either for greater emphasis, or because her little hand was soft and white, and began speaking in low measured accents, his eyes travelling from Liza's curls to her neck and to her waist. And with each resting place his voice gradually grew firmer.

"In the first place," said he, "because you read Byron in French, and consequently the beauty and power of the poet's language are lost on you. See how vapid and feeble the language is in this translation! It is the ashes of the great poet. His thoughts seem to have been diluted with water. The second reason why I would not advise you to read Byron is that he might awaken in your soul chords which might otherwise have slept eternally."

Here he pressed her hand firmly and expressively, as if by way of adding weight to his words.

"Why should you read Byron?" he continued. "Perhaps your life will flow as quietly as this stream. See how narrow it is, how shallow! It reflects neither the expanse of the sky, nor the clouds. There are no cliffs on its banks, no abysses. It flows playfully. Only the tiniest ripple ruffles its surface. It reflects nothing but the verdure on its banks, a patch of sky, a little cloud ... and thus, no doubt, your life would flow on, if you did not seek unnecessary emotions, storms. Do not strive to see life and human beings through dark-tinted glasses. Do not read this book! Look at everything with a smile, do not look into the distance, live for the present day, do not investigate the dark side of life and human beings, or—"

"Or what?"

"Nothing," said Alexander, as if checking himself.

"No, you must tell me. You have probably gone through something yourself."

"Where's my rod? Excuse me, it's time for me to go."

He seemed perturbed at having expressed himself so incautiously.

"One more word," pleaded Liza. "Should not a poet arouse sympathy for himself? Byron is a great poet, why don't you want me to feel sympathy for him? Am I so stupid, so insignificant that I shall not understand...."

She pretended to be offended.

"It's not that at all. Sympathize with a poet more in keeping with your feminine heart. Seek a heart in harmony with yours, otherwise terrible dissonances may be awakened ... both in your head and in your heart."

Here he shook his own head, as if hinting that he had himself been the victim of such dissonances.

"One will show you a flower," he said, "and make you enjoy its fragrance and beauty, while another will show you nothing but the poisonous juices in its calyx ... and then both beauty and aroma will be lost on you. He will make you wonder ruefully why these juices exist, and you will forget about the aroma. There is a difference between these individuals and the sympathy they inspire. Do not seek poison, do not burrow into the origins of all that goes on within and around you. Do not seek unnecessary experience. It is not this which leads to happiness."

He stopped speaking. She had been listening to him with grave trustfulness.

"Go on, go on," she said, now all childish sabbissiveness. "I could listen to you for days, obey you in everything!"

"Me?" said Alexander coldly. "What earthly right have I to rule your will? Forgive me for having ventured to make a remark! Read whatever you like. *Childe Harold* is a very good poem. Byron is a great poet."

"No, no, don't pretend! Don't talk like that! Tell me what to read!"

Assuming a learned air, he named a few historical works, and books of travel, but she said she had had enough of that sort of thing at boarding school. Then he proposed Walter Scott, Fenimore Cooper, some French and English authors and authoresses, and two or three Russian authors, displaying, as if involuntarily, his own literary taste and tact. After this they had no more of such conversation.

Alexander made heroic efforts to escape.

"What do I care about women!" he said. "I can no longer love, I have outlived those days."

"All right, all right!" growled Kostyakov. "Marry, and then you'll see! When I was young I thought of nothing but playing about with girls and wenches, but when the time came to lead one to the altar, I was like one possessed, someone seemed to push me into marriage."

And Alexander did not run away. All his former dreams raised their heads again. His heart began to beat more rapidly. Liza's waist, her foot, one of her curls flashed past his eyes, and life looked bright once more. For three days running Kostyakov did not have to persuade him, it was he who suggested going fishing.

"The same old story," Alexander said to himself. "But I am firm." And yet he made all haste for the river-bank.

Liza always awaited the arrival of the friends with impatience. Every evening a cup of fragrant tea and rum was prepared for Kostyakov, and perhaps it was partly due to this ruse of Liza's that they never missed a single evening. If they were late, Liza and her father would go to meet them. When bad weather kept the friends within doors the next day endless reproaches would be showered both on them and on the weather.

After much thought Alexander decided, though why, he did not rightly know, to put a stop to these outings, and neither he nor Kostyakov went fishing for a whole week. At last, however, they started again.

They met Liza and her nurse almost half a mile from the place where they used to fish. She cried out when she caught sight of them, and then, suddenly embarrassed, blushed. Alexander bowed coldly. Kostyakov began chattering.

"Here we are!" he said. "You weren't expecting us? Hee, hee! I see you weren't—no samovar! We haven't met for a long time, Miss, a long time. Are the fish biting? I kept wanting to go but Alexander Fyodorich here wouldn't be persuaded. Sitting in his room all day ... and not even sitting, lying down."

She cast a reproachful glance at Alexander.

"What's the meaning of this?" she asked.

"The meaning of what?"

"You haven't been for a whole week, have you?"

"About a week, I think."

"And why not?"

"I didn't feel like it."

"You didn't feel like it!" she repeated in amazement.

"No. And what about it?"

She said nothing, but seemed to be thinking: "Can it be that you really didn't want to come?"

"I wanted to send Papa to town to look for you," she said, "but I don't know where you live."

"To town, to look for me? What for?"

"Funny question!" she said in injured tones. "What for? I wanted to find out if anything was wrong, if you were quite well."

"Why, what is it to you?"

"To me? Oh heavens!"

"Oh, heavens, what?"



"Well, you see I ... I have your books." She showed her embarrassment. "To stay away a whole week!" she said again.

"Am I bound to be here every day, then?"

"Yes, you are."

"What for?"

"'What for,' 'what for!'" She looked at him mournfully, repeating, "'What for,' 'what for!'"

He glanced at her. What was this? Tears, confusion, joy, reproaches? She was pale and had grown a little thinner, her eyelids were red.

"So that's it! Already!" thought Alexander. "I didn't expect it so soon." He gave a loud laugh.

"'What for?' you say! Listen," she began.

Determination gleamed in her eyes. She was obviously preparing the way for some important utterance, but just then her father approached them.

"Till tomorrow!" she said. "I must have a talk with you tomorrow. I can't today. My heart is too full ... will you come tomorrow? Look here—you won't forget us? You won't leave us?"

And she ran off without waiting for a reply.

Her father looked steadily from her to Aduyev, and shook his head. Alexander gazed after her in silence. He seemed to pity her and to be vexed with himself for having imperceptibly led her along this path. The blood rushed, not to his heart, but to his head.

"She is in love with me," Alexander said to himself, on his way home. "Oh, God, what a bore! How idiotic! I shan't be able to go there any more now, and the fish are biting splendidly! Very annoying."

And yet he seemed to be inwardly not altogether displeased, and for some reason was very cheerful, chattering incessantly to Kostyakov.



The obliging imagination did not fail to draw him a full-length portrait of Liza—her voluptuous shoulders, her slender waist—nor was the little foot forgotten. A strange sensation stirred within him, once more tremors ran over his whole frame, but died away before reaching his heart. He analyzed this sensation from its source to its termination.

"Beast!" he muttered under his breath. "So these are the thoughts which haunt your mind. Bare shoulders, breasts, a little foot ... to exploit trustfulness, inexperience, to deceive ... very well, deceive, and then what? The same old boredom, and perhaps remorse as well, and what for? No! No! I will not allow myself, I will not lead her to — Oh, I will be firm! I feel that I have the purity of soul, the generosity of heart. I will not perish, nor drag her down with me!"

Liza awaited him the whole day in pleasing agitation, but at last her heart sank—she grew timid, why, she knew not, she felt sad, she almost hoped Alexander would not come. When the appointed hour came and there was no Alexander, her impatience developed into weary sadness. With the last ray of sunshine all her hopes vanished—she wept.

The next day she awaited him again, again started the morning in gay spirits, but by evening her heart throbbed still more painfully, and she knew fear and hope. Again they did not come.

On the third and fourth days the same thing! But hope still lured her to the river-bank. If a boat appeared in the distance, or two shadows flitted along the bank, she would tremble and languish beneath the burden of joyful expectation. But when she saw that it was not they who were in the boat, that the shadows were not theirs, she let her head droop sadly, despair took a firmer hold on her soul.

A minute later cunning hope whispered to her some consoling excuse for the delay, and once more her heart beat in expectation. And Alexander delayed, as if purposely.

At last, when, more dead than alive, with despair in her soul, she was seated in her place beneath the tree, she suddenly heard a rustling. Turning, she started in joyful trepidation—before her, his arms folded, stood Alexander!

She stretched out her hands to him with tears of joy and for a long time was unable to recover her equanimity. He took her hand, gazing thirstily, as much moved as she was, into her face.

"You have grown thin," he said softly. "Do you suffer?" She trembled.

"You stayed away so long," she brought out.

"And did you expect me?"

"I?" she replied eagerly. "Oh, if you knew...!"

She completed the sentence with a firm pressure of his hand.

"I have come to bid you good-bye," he said, and stopped to see how she was taking it.

She glanced at him in terror and incredulity.

"It can't be true!" said she.

"But it is," said he.

"Oh," she said suddenly, with a timid look all round her. "Don't go away, for God's sake, don't go away! I'll tell you a secret! Papa can see us from the window. Come to our garden, to the summer-house... it looks out over the fields, I'll show you the way."

They turned and walked away together. Alexander never took his eyes off her shoulders, her slender waist, and was conscious of a feverish trembling.

"What does it matter," he thought, as he followed her, "whether I go or not? I'll just have a look—see what it's

like in their summer-house. After all, her father invited me! I could go there perfectly openly. But I am far from temptation, far, God knows, and I will prove it. I went straight to her and told her I was going away ... though I'm not going anywhere. Demon—you shall not tempt me!" But here Krylov's little imp, emerging from behind the hermit's stove, seemed to whisper in his ear: "Then why did you come and tell her? There was no need for that. You should not have come—you would have been forgotten in a fortnight."

But Alexander thought he was acting nobly in not shrinking from a deed of self-sacrifice, by struggling with temptation face to face. The first trophy won by his victory over himself was the kiss he stole from Liza, and then he put his arm round her waist and told her he wasn't going away at all, that he had made it up to try her, to discover whether she had any feeling for him. Finally, by way of clenching the victory, he promised to be at the summer-house the same hour on the following day. On his way home he thought over what he had done, going hot and cold in turns. He was overcome with horror and could hardly believe it. At last he decided not to go the next day—and turned up before the appointed hour.

August had already come, and the dusk was beginning to fall. Alexander had promised to be there at nine, but arrived at eight, alone, and without his fishing-rod. He crept up to the summer-house like a thief, looking round furtively, and every now and then breaking into a run. But somebody was earlier than him. Whoever it was ran panting into the summer-house and sat down on a bench in a dark corner.

Somebody seemed to be watching for Alexander. He opened the door softly, in a violent state of agitation, tiptoed over to the bench and gently took the hand of—

Liza's father. Alexander started back, as if to run away, but the old man held him by the skirt of his coat and forced him to sit down beside him.

"What did you come here for, friend?" he asked.

"I ... for fish...." muttered Alexander, scarcely opening his lips. His teeth chattered. The old man was by no means awe-inspiring, but Alexander, like any thief caught in the act, shook in his shoes.

"Fish!" repeated the old man mockingly. "D'you know the expression 'fishing in troubled waters'? I have been watching you for a long time, and I think I understand you now. And my Liza I have known since she was so high. She's kind-hearted and trustful, and you—you are a dangerous rascal."

Alexander tried to get up but the old man detained him with a hand on his arm.

"Don't be angry with me, my friend! By pretending to be unhappy, and to avoid Liza, you won her affection, assured yourself of this, and intended to profit by it. Do you call that honest? What am I to take you for?"

"I swear on my honour I did not foresee the consequences," said Alexander in a voice which carried profound conviction. "I had no intention—"

The old man was silent for a few moments.

"Perhaps that is so," he said. "Perhaps you tried to turn the poorgirl's head not from love, but simply from idleness, without knowing what the result would be. If successful—well and good, if not—never mind! There are plenty of young fellows like that in Petersburg. Do you know how such dandies are dealt with?"

Alexander sat there with lowered eyelids. He had not the spirit to stand up for himself.

"At first I had a better opinion of you, but I was mistaken, grossly mistaken. Look what a meek fellow you made your-

self out to be! Thank God I found you out in time! Now listen to me--there is no time to be lost. The silly girl will appear at the rendezvous before we know where we are. I kept a watch on you yesterday. She must not see us together. You will go away and of course never come back. She will think you have deceived her and it will be a lesson for her. But mind—you must never come here again. Find another place for fishing, or else ... I will turn you out, and none too tenderly. Be thankful that Liza can still look me straight in the eyes. Otherwise you would leave this place by another road! I have been watching her all day. Good-bye!"

Alexander tried to speak but the old man opened the door and almost pushed him out.

The reader may judge for himself of Alexander's situation, if he is not ashamed for a moment to put himself in his place. My hero actually shed tears, tears of shame, fury with himself, despair....

"Why do I go on living?" he said aloud. "Hateful, atrocious life! And I ... I.... But no ... I had not the strength of character to resist temptation ... but I still have strength enough to put an end to this useless, shameful existence."

He strode rapidly towards the river. The water was black. Long, fantastic, distorted shadows raced over its waves. At the place where Alexander stood the river was shallow.

"One can't even die here!" he said scornfully and went towards the bridge, about a hundred paces further on.

Alexander stood in the middle of the bridge, leaning against the rail, and gazing at the water. Mentally taking leave of life, he favoured his mother with a sigh, his aunt with a blessing, and even forgave Nadenka.

Tears of emotion ran down his cheeks. He covered his face with his hands. Who knows what he might have done, if suddenly the boards had not begun to shake beneath his feet? He turned. Heavens! He was on the edge of an abyss. The grave yawned before him. The bridge parted and moved aside to allow some barges to pass; another moment and all would have been over. He gathered up all his forces and took a desperate leap, landing on the other side. Once there he stood panting and pressing his hand against his heart.

"What's the matter, Master—had a fright?" the watchman asked him.

"Oh, Brother, I almost fell into the very middle," replied Alexander tremulously.

"God forbid—think of that!" exclaimed the watchman, yawning. "Last summer a bargeman did fall in."

Alexander made off, his hand still clutching at his heart. Every now and then he glanced at the river and the open bridge, and immediately turned away, trembling and hastening his steps.

Every evening Liza dressed herself up and went out, without either father or nurse, and sat under the tree till late in the night.

The evenings began to be dark. She waited and waited, but there were not the slightest signs of life from the friends.

Autumn set in. The yellow leaves fell from the trees and carpeted the banks of the river. The foliage faded; the river turned leaden-coloured, the sky was grey, a cold wind blew, bringing with it the fine rain. Banks and river were deserted. There was no sound either of gay songs, laughter, or resonant voices. Boats and light craft no longer hurried by. Not a single insect buzzed in

the grass, not a bird twittered in the trees. There was nothing but rooks and crows with their dismal cawing. And the fish no longer rose to bite.

And still Liza waited. She felt she simply must speak to Alexander—she had a secret to tell him. She sat on, on the bench beneath the tree, a sleeveless jacket over her dress. She lost weight, her eyes grew hollow, she wore a kerchief tied under her chin. Her father found her in this state one day.

“Come, you’ve sat here long enough!” he said, grimacing and shivering with cold. “Look, your hands are quite blue! You’re cold! Come, Liza! Do you hear me?”

“Where?”

“Home. We’ll go back to town today.”

“Why?” she asked in surprise.

“Why? It’s autumn—we are the only ones left here.”

“Oh, dear!” she said. “It’ll be nice here in the winter, too! Let’s stay!”

“Now what have you got into your head? Come, that’ll do!”

“Wait a little!” she said in imploring tones. “The fine days will come back!”

“Listen to me,” said her father, patting her on the cheek and pointing to the place where the friends had fished. “They will not come back.”

“Not come back?” she repeated in mournful, questioning tones, and then she gave her father her hand and slowly, her head drooping, went back to the house, every now and then looking over her shoulder.

Aduyev and Kostyakov had for a long time been fishing somewhere in the opposite direction.



Alexander gradually forgot Liza and the unpleasant scene with her father. Once again he was tranquil, even cheerful, and often laughed at Kostyakov's flat witticisms. This man's attitude to life was a perpetual source of amusement to him. They even planned to go somewhere far away and build a hut on the bank of some river where the fish were plentiful, and there live out the remainder of their days. Once more Alexander's soul was steeped in the ooze of petty ideas and the material side of life. But fate was not dreaming, and he did not sink utterly in this ooze.

That autumn he got a note from his aunt earnestly requesting him to take her to a concert, for his uncle was indisposed. A celebrated European musician had arrived.

"A concert!" exclaimed Alexander, deeply perturbed. "A concert! To plunge again into the crowd, into the very glitter of all that tinsel, falseness, hypocrisy! No, I won't go!"

"And it'll cost five rubles into the bargain," remarked Kostyakov who was in the room.

"The ticket'll be fifteen rubles," said Alexander. "But I would gladly give fifty to get out of going."

"Fifteen!" exclaimed Kostyakov, throwing out his hands. "The rascals! They come here to swindle us, to steal our money! Accursed parasites! Don't you go, Alexander Fyodorich—have nothing to do with it! If it was something real—something you could take home, put on the table, or eat ... but just for listening, there you are—pay fifteen rubles! You could buy a foal for fifteen rubles!"

"People sometimes spend even more for the sake of an evening's pleasure," said Alexander.

"An evening's pleasure! I'll tell you what—let's go to the baths, we'll have a nice evening! Whenever I feel bored that's what I do and it's fine! You go there about six and come back at midnight, you warm yourself, you scrape yourself, and sometimes make a nice new friend. Some clergyman, or merchant or officer comes in, and the conversation turns on trade, or, say, the end of the world, and it's so nice you don't want to go away! And all for sixty kopeks a head! And people say they don't know what to do with their evenings!"

But Alexander did go to the concert. Sighing, he took out his last year's frock-coat, so long unworn, and drew on white gloves.

"Gloves, five rubles—that's twenty," reckoned Kostyakov, who was present at Alexander's toilet. "Twenty rubles—and all thrown away in one evening! It's hard to believe!"

Alexander had got out of the habit of being decently dressed. In the mornings he went to the office in his comfortable uniform, and in the evenings donned some old coat or other. He felt awkward in a frock-coat. It was tight in one place, felt uncomfortable in another. The satin cravat made his neck hot.

His aunt received him cordially, grateful to him for having brought himself to leave his seclusion for her sake, but she said not a word about his way of life or occupations.

When he had found a seat in the hall for Lizaveta Alexandrovna, Alexander leaned against a pillar in the shade of some broad-shouldered melomaniac, and gave himself up to tedium. He yawned softly into his hand, but before he could close his mouth thunders of applause broke out to greet the performer. Alexander did not so much as glance at him.

The orchestra struck up a kind of overture, which lasted only a few minutes. As its last sounds died away other sounds made themselves heard, at first impudent and playful, reminiscent of children's games. They were like childish voices, noisy, gay. The sounds grew smoother and more virile—they seemed to be expressing the recklessness of youth, audacity, an excess of life and strength. Then they became slower, softer, as if pouring out the tender effusions of love, of spiritual converse, and, gradually dying away, were merged in passionate whispers, till, imperceptibly, they ceased....

No one dared to move. The huge crowd sat silently entranced. Suddenly an unanimous "oh" came from the audience, and floated softly through the hall. The audience began to stir but the sounds awoke once more, poured out in a crescendo, in a torrent, and were scattered in a thousand cascades, leaping, jostling, trampling on one another. They thundered as if with jealous reproaches, seethed with the fury of passion. Hardly had the ear caught them, when they broke off, as if the instrument no longer had any strength, any voice left. Now from beneath the bow there escaped a hollow, broken moan, now tearful imploring sounds came from it, and all ended in a prolonged, painful sigh. A heart had broken. The sounds seemed to be singing of love forsworn, of hopeless grief. All the sorrow and sufferings of the human soul could be heard in them.

Alexander was moved to his depths. Raising his head he glanced through his tears over his neighbour's shoulder. The lean German bending over his instrument confronted the crowd, and imposed his will on it. He stopped playing, and passed his handkerchief indifferently over his hands and forehead. A roar of violent applause shook the hall. And suddenly this artist bent in his turn

before the crowd, and began assiduously bowing in gratitude to it.

"And he bows to them!" thought Alexander, glancing timidly at the hydra-headed monster. "He, who is head and shoulders above them!"

The violinist raised his bow and all fell quiet on the instant. The swaying crowd had once more become a motionless body. Other sounds flowed, majestic, solemn—sounds which made the hearers straighten their backs, lift their heads proudly. These sounds aroused pride in the heart, gave birth to dreams of glory. The orchestra came in with muffled sounds, like the hum of a distant crowd, like the voice of the people.

Alexander turned pale and let his head drop on to his chest. These sounds seemed to be relating to him with utter clarity his own past, his whole life, so bitter and disillusioned.

"Look at that man," said someone, pointing to Alexander. "I can't understand how people can show their feelings so! I heard Paganini, and I never turned a hair!"

Alexander cursed his aunt's invitation, the violinist, and above all fate, for not allowing him to rest in oblivion.

"And what for—to what end?" he asked himself. "What does fate want of me? Why remind me of my futility, the uselessness of the past, which will never come back?"

After seeing his aunt home he made an attempt to turn away, but she held him by the arm.

"Won't you come in?" she asked reproachfully.

"No."

"Why not?"

"It's late. I'll come some other time."

"And you refuse *my* request!"

"Yours more than anybody else's."

"But why?"

"It would take too long to tell. Good-bye."

"Just for half an hour, Alexander—please! Not more! If you refuse it means you never had the slightest friendship for me."

She asked him with such feeling, such urgency, that Alexander had not the heart to refuse, and followed her with a drooping head. Pyotr Ivanich was in his study.

"Have I really deserved nothing but contempt from you, Alexander?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna, seating him beside the fire.

"You are mistaken—it is not contempt," he replied.

"What is it then? What shall I call it? How often have I written to you, invited you here, and you never came, and at last even stopped answering my letters."

"It wasn't contempt."

"Then what was it?"

"Oh, nothing," said Alexander, and gave a sigh. "Good-bye, *ma tante!*"

"Wait! What have I done to you? What's the matter with you, Alexander? Why are you like this? Why are you indifferent to everything, why do you go nowhere, live in unsuitable society?"

"I just do, and that's all, *ma tante*. This way of life pleases me. It's peaceful, I like it. It suits me."

"Suits you? You find nourishment for your mind and heart in such a life, with such people?"

Alexander nodded.

"You are pretending, Alexander! Something has grieved you deeply and you say nothing about it! Formerly you found someone to confide your sorrows in. You knew you would always find consolation or at least sympathy. And now—have you no one?"

"No one."

"You don't believe in anyone?"

"In no one."

"And do you never think of your mother... of her love ... her caresses? And has it never occurred to you that here, too, perhaps, is someone who loves you, if not as she does, at any rate like a sister, or, still more, like a friend?"

"Good-bye, *ma tante*," he said.

"Good-bye, Alexander! I will not keep you any longer," said his aunt. Tears came into her eyes.

Alexander picked up his hat to go, but suddenly put it down and looked at Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"I cannot run away from you—I have not the strength," he said. "What have you done to me?"

"Be the old Alexander again, if only for one minute! Tell me, confide in me..."

"Yes—I cannot be silent in your presence. I will tell you all that is on my mind," he said. "You ask why I hide from people, why I am indifferent to everything, why I don't even go to see you? Why? Know, then, that I have long been sick of life and have chosen for myself a way in which life makes less demands on me. I desire nothing, seek nothing but peace, the slumber of the soul. I have tasted all the hollowness and wretchedness of life and I despise it heartily. *Whoever has lived and thought cannot but, in his soul, despise humanity.* Activity, cares, worries, distractions—I am sick of them all. I wish for nothing, I seek nothing. I have no aim, for one gains that which one is eager for—and sees that it is all illusion. My joyous days have passed. I have cooled to them. In the educated world, amidst human beings, I feel the disadvantages of life too strongly, but alone, far from the crowd, I turn to stone. In this trance anything can happen, I see neither

others nor myself. I do nothing and do not notice the actions either of others or myself—and I am at peace, I am indifferent. There can be no happiness for me, and I will not succumb to unhappiness.”

“That’s terrible, Alexander!” said his aunt. “At your age to be so indifferent to everything!”

“Why are you surprised, *ma tante*? Turn your eyes for a moment from the narrow horizon by which you are confined, look at life, at the world—what is it? Yesterday’s greatness is today’s nothingness; what was desirable yesterday is not desired today. The friend of yesterday is the foe of today. Is it really worth worrying about anything, loving, forming attachments, quarrelling, making it up—in a word, living? Is it not better to sleep, mind and heart? I sleep, and therefore I go nowhere, especially not to you. I would sleep for ever, and you arouse my mind and my heart, and push me once more into the whirlpool. If you want to see me gay, healthy, perhaps alive, perhaps even, according to my uncle’s ideas, happy—then leave me as I now am. Let these agitations calm down, let aspirations die away, let the mind be in an utter trance, the heart turn to stone, the eyes forget what tears are, the lips forget to smile and then—in a year or two I will come to you ready for any test—then you will not be able to arouse me, try as you may ... but now—”

He made a gesture of despair.

“See, Alexander,” his aunt interrupted him eagerly. “You have changed in a single moment! There are tears in your eyes, you are the same as you used to be! Do not pretend, do not repress your feelings, give them an outlet.”

“What for? Shall I be any the better for it? I will only suffer the more. This evening has lowered me in my



own eyes. I see clearly that I have no right to blame anyone for my sufferings. It is I who have ruined my life. I dreamed of glory—why? God alone knows!—and despised my work. I rejected my modest vocation and can no longer set the past to rights—it is too late. I fled the crowd, despised it, but that German with his strong, deep soul, his poetic nature, does not reject the world, does not flee the crowd. He is proud of their applause. He knows he is a mere insignificant link in the endless chain of humanity. He knows what I know, too. He is acquainted with suffering. Did you hear him tell the story of his life in sound—its joys and its griefs, its happiness and spiritual sufferings? He understands life. How trifling, how insignificant I appeared in my own eyes today, with my grief, my sufferings. He aroused in me the bitter consciousness that I am proud—and helpless.... Oh, why did you invite me? Good-bye, let me go!"

"Was it my fault, Alexander? Surely I could not arouse bitter feelings in you—I?"

"That's just the trouble! Your angelic, sweet face, *ma tante*, your kind words, the friendly pressure of your hand—all this confuses and moves me. I want to cry, to live once more, to suffer—and what for?"

"What for? Stay among us for good! And if you consider me the least little bit worthy of your friendship, it means you will find consolation in someone else too. I am not the only one—you will find someone to appreciate you."

"And you think this will always console me! You think I shall be able to believe in this fleeting emotion? You are a woman in the noblest sense of the word. You were made for joy, to make some man happy, but can one count on such happiness? Can one be sure that it is solid, that today, tomorrow, fate will not overturn this happy life—that

is the question! Can one believe in anything or in anyone, even in oneself? Would it not be better to live without hopes and emotions, expecting nothing, seeking no joys, and, consequently, weeping for no losses?"

"There's no getting away from your fate, Alexander. It'll follow you even where you now are."

"I know that. But there fate has nothing to play with, I myself can play with fate—now it is a fish which gets away from the hook, just as I am stretching out my hand to take it, or it rains when I was going to go to the country, or the weather is fine, but I have no inclination to go out... and all this is merely funny."

Lizaveta Alexandrovna could find no more objections to raise.

"You will marry ... you will love," she said uncertainly.

"I marry! What an idea! Do you really think I would trust my happiness to a woman even if I loved her, which is an impossibility? Or do you think I would undertake to make a woman happy? No, I know very well we should deceive each other, and both be deceived. My uncle Pyotr Ivanich and my experience have taught me."

"Pyotr Ivanich—yes, he has much to answer for," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna with a sigh. "But you were not bound to listen to him ... and you might have been happy, married."

"Yes, of course—in the country. But now! No, *ma tante*, marriage is not for me! I am no longer able to pretend after I have ceased to love, and I should stop being happy, and I would not be able to help seeing, if my wife pretended. We would both pretend as ... for example ... you and my uncle pretend."

"We do?" exclaimed Lizaveta Alexandrovna in astonishment and alarm.

"Yes, you! Tell me, are you as happy as you once dreamed of being?"

"Not as I dreamed ... but happy in another way, perhaps a more reasonable way, more happy, perhaps—what does it matter?" replied Lizaveta Alexandrovna in confusion. "And you would be too!"

"More reasonable! Oh, *ma tante*, it is not you speaking—it is the voice of my uncle! I know what happiness means according to his system—it may be more reasonable, but is it greater? Why, for him there is nothing but happiness—unhappiness does not exist. But never mind him! No, no! My life is finished. I am tired, weary of life."

They both fell silent. Alexander glanced at his hat. His aunt tried to think of a means to keep him.

"And your talent?" she said with sudden animation.

"Oh, *ma tante*, how can you laugh at me! You have forgotten the Russian saying—don't hit a man when he's down! I have no talent, none whatever! I have feeling, I used to have an ardent imagination. I took dreams for creative power, and tried to create. Quite recently I came upon one of my early sins, and read it—I wanted to laugh myself. My uncle was right when he made me burn everything I had. Oh, if I could bring back the past! I would use it quite differently."

"Do not give way to utter disappointment," she said. "Each of us has a heavy cross to bear."

"Who's the cross for?" asked Pyotr Ivanich, coming into the room. "Hullo, Alexander! Is it for you?"

Pyotr Ivanich's shoulders were bowed and he lifted his feet with difficulty.

"Not the sort of cross you mean," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "I was speaking of the heavy cross which Alexander has to bear."

"Now what has he to bear?" asked Pyotr Ivanich, letting himself down with the utmost caution into a chair. "Oh, the pain! What a visitation!"

Lizaveta Alexandrovna helped him to sit down, placed a cushion at his back, moved a stool under his feet.

"What's the matter with you, Uncle?" asked Alexander.

"As you see, I bear a heavy cross. Oh, my poor back. There's a cross for you! This is what my service has brought me to! Oh, my God."

"You shouldn't sit so long. You know this climate," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "The doctor told you to take more exercise, but no—you write from morning to evening and play cards all night!"

"Am I to go gaping about the streets and wasting time?"

"Well—there's your punishment."

"There's no escape from it if you go in for business. Who is there whose back does not ache? It's almost a mark of distinction for every business man. Oh, I can't straighten my spine! Well, Alexander, what are you doing?"

"The same as before."

"Ah! And your back doesn't ache! It's really a wonder!"

"What is there to wonder at? Aren't you partly to blame yourself that he's become like he is?" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"Me? I like that! I taught him to do nothing!"

"Indeed, Uncle, there is no cause for wonder," said Alexander. "You did much to help circumstances to make of me what I am now. But I do not blame you. I blame myself for not knowing how, or rather, for being unable, to profit by your lessons as I should have, owing to my

being unprepared for them. Perhaps you are partly to blame in that, for though you summed me up at first sight, you tried to change me. As an experienced man you should have seen that this was impossible. You aroused in me a struggle between two opposing outlooks and could not reconcile them. And what is the result? All within me is doubt, chaos."

"Oh, my back!" groaned Pyotr Ivanich. "Chaos! What I wanted was to make something of this chaos!"

"Yes—and what did you do? You presented life to me at its seamiest, and at my age, when I should have seen nothing but the bright side!"

"That is to say, I tried to show you life as it is, so that you should not get into your head that which does not exist. I remember what a hot-headed fellow you were when you came from the country. I had to warn you that one can't go on like that here. I may have saved you from many mistakes and follies. But for me you might have perpetrated many more."

"Perhaps. But you overlooked one thing, Uncle—happiness! You forgot that happiness is made up of illusions, dreams and hopes. Reality does not make people happy."

"What nonsense you talk! You brought these views with you straight from the borders of Asia. In Europe they have long gone out of fashion. Dreams, toys, illusions—all that will do for women and children, but men must know things as they are. Do you consider it would be better to go on being deceived?"

"You can say what you like, Uncle, but happiness is woven from illusions, hopes, belief in others, confidence in oneself—later from love, friendship.... And you assured me that love is nonsense, a hollow feeling, that it is easy, and even better, to live without it. That to love

passionately is no great virtue, that we can never rise superior to the animals through it—”

“Just you look back and remember how you longed to fall in love—writing such bad verses, and speaking in such stilted language, that you bored your ... Grunya, wasn't it, to death! Is that the way to win a woman?”

“What is then?” asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna coldly.

“Oh, what twinges in my back!” groaned Pyotr Ivanich.

“And then you assured me,” continued Alexander, “that profound mutual affection does not exist, and that everything is habit.”

Lizaveta Alexandrovna gazed with silent intentness at her husband.

“That is to say I spoke to you for your ... oh, oh, my back!”

“And all that,” continued Alexander, “to a youth of twenty, for whom love was everything, whose activities, aim, everything revolved round this feeling! Whom this alone could have saved or utterly ruined!”

“Anyone would think you were born two hundred years ago!” muttered Pyotr Ivanich. “You ought to be living in the days of fairy-tales.”

“You expounded to me,” said Alexander, “your theory of love, deception, treachery, cooling off.... So that I knew all this before I began to love, and when I did love I analyzed my love as a student dissects a corpse under the guidance of his professor, seeing not the beauty of its forms, but only muscles, nerves—”

“And yet I seem to remember this did not prevent you from being madly in love with that, what's her name? Dasha, wasn't it?”

“True. But you would not allow me to deceive myself. I would have seen in Nadenka's treachery nothing but



chance misfortune, and have gone on hoping until the time when love is no longer a necessity, but you were on the spot with your theory, and showed me that this was in the order of things, and I, at twenty-five, lost faith in happiness and in life, and grew old in my soul. Friendship you denied, calling it, too, mere habit. You called yourself, no doubt in jest, my best friend, simply to prove that there is no such thing as friendship."

Pyotr Ivanich listened, rubbing his back with one hand. He defended himself carelessly, like a man who knew he could crush all the accusations brought against him with a single word.

"And a fine idea you had of friendship!" said he. "You wanted your friend to play just such a comedy as those two fools of ancient times—what's their name?—are said to have done, one of them remaining as a pledge, while the other—what was it he **did**? Supposing everyone were to go on like that—why, the whole world would be a mad-house!"

"I loved people," continued Alexander. "I believed in their qualities, regarded them as brothers, was ready to open my arms to them in a warm embrace—"

"And a lot of good that was! I remember your embraces," interrupted Pyotr Ivanich. "You bored me to death with them!"

"And you showed me what they were worth. Instead of training my heart through affection you taught me not to feel, but to analyze, to examine people and beware of them. I did so, and stopped loving."

"Who could tell you would be like that? You were such a bright chap, you know! I thought this would make you more indulgent to others. I know people, and you see I don't hate them."

"So you love people?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.



"I'm used to them."

"Used to them!" she repeated dully.

"And he would have got used to them too," said Pyotr Ivanich. "But he was already thoroughly spoiled in the country by that aunt of his with her yellow blossoms, and so his development was retarded."

"I used to believe in myself," resumed Alexander. "You showed me that I was still worse than others, and I hated myself, too."

"If you had looked at things more coolly, you would have seen that you are neither better nor worse than others, which was what I wanted you to see. Then you would have hated neither others nor yourself, and would have borne human follies indifferently, and have been more conscious of your own. I know my own worth, I see that I am not so very nice, but I admit that I am very fond of myself."

"Ah, of yourself, you're fond—you're not just used to yourself!" remarked Lizaveta Alexandrovna coldly.

"Oh, my back!" groaned Pyotr Ivanich.

"Finally, with a single blow, without the slightest warning, without pity, you destroyed my best dream. I thought I had a spark of poetical talent—you ruthlessly showed me that I was not born to be a high priest of the beautiful. You tore this splinter out of my heart in the most painful manner, and proposed work which was highly distasteful to me. But for you I would have gone on writing—"

"And would have become known to the public as a mediocre writer," interrupted Pyotr Ivanich.

"What do I care about the public? I would have done my best for myself, and attributed my failures to hostility, envy, ill-will, and gradually grown accustomed to the idea that I must not write, and would have gone

in for something else. Why are you surprised that, on learning the whole truth, I was plunged into melancholy?"

"Well, what have you to say to that?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"I don't feel inclined to say anything. How am I to reply to such nonsense? Am I to blame that you, on arriving here, fancied that all was yellow blossoms, love and friendship, that people do nothing but write poetry or listen to it—occasionally, just for a change, going in for prose? I proved to you that a man must work—everywhere, but here especially—and work hard, work till his back aches ... there are no yellow blossoms, there are rank, money. And these are a great deal better! That's what I wanted to make you see! I did not despair of your understanding at last what life is, especially life as now understood. And you did, but when you realized that there were very few blossoms and poems in it you decided that life was a grand error, that you had seen this and were therefore entitled to mope, whereas others, apparently not having noticed this, go about in the best of spirits. Well, and why are you discontented? What do you lack? Another in your place would bless his fate. Neither need, nor sickness, nor serious grief has ever touched you. What is it you lack? Love? You still haven't had enough? You've been in love twice, and been loved. You have been deceived, and you have had your revenge. We have agreed that you have friends such as few have. Not false friends, even if they are not ready to go through fire and water for you, and not fond of embracing. All that's simply idiotic, understand it once and for all! But friends always ready with advice, assistance, even money. Don't you call that friends? In time you will marry. You have a career before you, you have only to work. And a fortune will come with it. Do as others do, and fate will not ignore

you. You will come into your own. It's ridiculous to fancy yourself a special, great being, when you were not born to be one. Well, what have you to grieve over?"

"I don't blame you, Uncle. On the contrary, I appreciate your intentions and am heartily grateful for them. It can't be helped if they failed, can it? But don't you blame me, either. We have not understood each other, that's the trouble. That which pleases and suits you and many others, does not please me."

"Pleases me and many others!' You're talking nonsense, my dear fellow! Am I the only one to think and act as I have tried to teach you to think and act? Look round you! Look at what you call the *crowd*, not at those who live in the country, all this will take a long time to reach *them*, but at the modern, educated, thinking and acting crowd. What do they want, to what do they aspire? How do they think? And you will see that they act and think as I have tried to teach you. It was not I who invented all that I expect of you."

"Who then?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"The age."

"And is everybody bound to obey whatever this age of yours invents?" she asked. "Is all this so sacred, is it all so true?"

"It is all sacred," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"What! It is true that we should think more and feel less? That we should not yield to the will of the heart, but restrain its impulses? Not yield to emotion, not believe in it?"

"Quite true," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"Always act according to system, trust others as little as possible, consider everyone unreliable, and live to oneself alone?"

"Yes."

"And is that a sacred truth, that love is not the principal thing in life, that we should love our business more than the person dearest to us, not put our trust in anyone's devotion, believe that love must come to an end in coolness, deception, or habit? That friendship is only habit? Is all this true?"

"It has always been true," replied Pyotr Ivanich. "Formerly people would not believe it, and now it has become a truth universally acknowledged."

"And it is sacred that everything must be examined, reckoned, thought out, that we must never try to lose ourselves in oblivion, never dream, never cherish an illusion simply because it makes one happy?"

"Sacred because rational," said Pyotr Ivanich.

"It is true, also, that one should treat according to the dictates of reason even she who is nearest to one's heart—one's wife for example?"

"Never have I had such a pain in my back ... oh!" said Pyotr Ivanich, writhing in his seat.

"Your back! A fine age, I must say!"

"A very fine age, a splendid age! Nothing is done from mere caprice—everywhere are reason, cause, experience, gradual progress and, consequently, success. Everything working for perfection and good."

"There may be truth in what you say, Uncle," said Alexander, "but it does not console me. I know everything according to your theory, I look at things through your eyes. I am a product of your school, and yet I find life tedious, hard, unbearable. Why is that?"

"You are not used to the new order. You're not the only one. There are still backward individuals—they are all *martyrs*. They are pitiable, indeed, but what's to be done about it? The majority cannot stay behind for a handful of people. For all of which you have just

accused me," said Pyotr Ivanich, after a pause, "I have one general justification—do you remember when you came here how I, after five minutes' talk with you, advised you to go back? You did not obey me. Why do you now attack me? I warned you you would never get used to the prevailing order of things, and you hoped for my guidance, asked for advice, spoke in highflown terms of the achievements of the brain, of mankind's aspirations ... of the practical trend of the age! And there you are! I could not follow you about from morning till night. Why should I? I could not cover your mouth with a handkerchief at night to keep the flies off, and make the sign of the cross over you. I spoke sense to you, because you asked me to. And what came of it is not my business. You are not a child, and you are no fool. You can judge for yourself. And instead of setting to work, you either groaned over the deception of a chit, or wept at separation from a friend, suffered from spiritual blankness, or from a superfluity of sensations. What sort of a life is that? Why, it's torture! Look at the young men of today—what fine fellows they are! What mental activity, what energy, how deftly and easily they cope with all that nonsense which in your old-fashioned language is called agitation, sufferings, and God knows what else!"

"How easily you reason," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "Aren't you at all sorry for Alexander?"

"Not a bit! If his back ached, now, that would be something to pity him for! That's no invention, no dream, no poetry, that's real trouble! Oh!"

"At least teach me what to do now, Uncle. How would you solve my problem with your reason?"

"Do? Why ... go back to the country."

"To the country!" repeated Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "Are you in your right mind, Pyotr Ivanich? What would he do there?"

"To the country!" echoed Alexander, and they both gazed at Pyotr Ivanich.

"Yes, to the country. You would see your mother, comfort her. You say you want a quiet life. Everything here upsets you. And where could it be quieter than there, beside the lake, with your aunt. Go, for goodness' sake. Who knows perhaps you would ... oh!"

He clutched at his back.

A fortnight later Alexander resigned his post and went to say good-bye to his uncle and aunt. Alexander and his aunt were mournful and silent. Tears hung on Lizaveta Alexandrovna's eyelashes. Pyotr Ivanich alone spoke.

"Neither career nor fortune," he said, shaking his head. "Was it worth coming? You have disgraced the name of the Aduyevs."

"That'll do, Pyotr Ivanich," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "I'm sick of you and your career!"

"Eight years, my dear, and nothing done!"

"Good-bye, Uncle," said Alexander. "Thank you for everything, everything!"

"No need for thanks! Good-bye, Alexander. You don't need any money for your journey?"

"No, thanks. I have enough."

"How is it you never take any money? It makes me quite angry. Well, God bless you, God bless you!"

"Aren't you sorry to part with him?" put in Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"H'm," muttered Pyotr Ivanich. "I ... have got used to him. Remember, Alexander, that you have an uncle and a friend, d'you hear me? And if you should ever need a post, work and filthy lucre, don't hesitate to turn to me. You will always find any of these three things."

"And if you should ever need sympathy," said Liza-



veta Alexandrovna, "consolation in grief, warm, tried friendship—"

"And sincere effusions," added Pyotr Ivanich.

"—Then remember," continued Lizaveta Alexandrovna, "that you have an aunt and a friend."

"He won't have to borrow all that in the country, my dear. It'll all be there—flowers, love, effusions, even an aunt."

Alexander was touched. He could not say a word. On taking leave of his uncle he would have folded him in his arms, though not quite so eagerly as eight years ago. Pyotr Ivanich did not embrace him, but only took both his hands in his own and pressed them more warmly than eight years ago. Lizaveta Alexandrovna melted into tears.

"Ugh! A weight off my shoulders, thank God!" said Pyotr Ivanich when Alexander had gone. "Even my back doesn't ache quite so much!"

"What harm did he do you?" asked his wife through her tears.

"Why, he fairly tormented me! He was worse than my factory hands! If they misbehave at least one can flog them. But what are you to do with him?"

Alexander's aunt cried all day and when Pyotr Ivanich asked for dinner he was told that the table was not laid, and that the mistress had locked herself into her room and refused to see the *chef*.

"And all because of Alexander!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "Nothing but worry with him!"

He growled and scolded, and went to dine at the English Club.

Early next morning the diligence rumbled slowly out of town, carrying with it Alexander Fyodorich and Yevsei.



Alexander, thrusting his head out of the carriage window, did his best to give a melancholy tinge to his mood and at last vented his feelings in an unspoken monologue.

They passed by hairdressers' shops, dentists' rooms, dress-making establishments and gentlemen's mansions. "Farewell," quoth he, shaking his head and clutching at his sparse hair. "Farewell, city of false hair, artificial teeth, stuffed imitations of nature, round-brimmed hats, city of courteous arrogance, artificial feelings, meaningless bustle! Farewell, majestic tomb of profound, powerful, warm and tender impulses of the soul! For eight years I stood face to face here with modern life, but with my back to nature, and she turned away from me. I have wasted my vital forces and grown old at twenty-nine. But there was a time — Farewell, farewell, city

*Where I have suffered, I have loved,  
And where my heart lies buried!  
To you I open my arms, broad fields,  
To you, blest spaces and meadows of my native land!  
Enfold me once again, and I will return,  
My soul will wake to life and hope once more."*

After this he spouted a poem of Pushkin's: *The clumsy dauber with his languid brush*, wiped his moist eyes, and nestled into the depths of the carriage.

## VI

It was a glorious morning. The lake the reader knows so well, on the banks of which the village of Grachi is situated, rippled faintly beneath a light breeze. The dazzling brilliance of the sun's rays, reflected in iridescent sparks on the surface of the water, made the passer-by involuntarily screw up his eyes. The weeping birches

dipped their branches in the lake, and here and there the bank was overgrown with sedge in the midst of which hid great yellow flowers, resting on broad, floating leaves. Every now and then a light cloud passed across the sun, which seemed to turn away from Grachi for a few moments, and then the lake, the copse and the village were instantly plunged in shadow. Only the distance was radiant with light. But the cloud passed on, and again the lake gleamed, and the cornfields seemed to be flooded with gold.

Anna Pavlovna had been sitting on the balcony ever since five in the morning. What had brought her there—the sunrise, the fresh air, the singing of the larks? No—she never took her eyes from the road leading through the copse. Agrafena came to ask for the keys. Anna Pavlovna did not so much as glance at her, but, her eyes still on the road, handed her the keys without even asking what she wanted them for. The *chef* appeared—she gave him a number of orders, without looking at him. Dinner for ten had been ordered for the last two days.

Anna Pavlovna was alone again. Suddenly her eyes shone—her whole being, body and soul, was concentrated in her eyes—a black spot had appeared on the road. Something was approaching, but very slowly. Oh, it was only a wagon coming down the hill! Anna Pavlovna frowned.

“Look who the devil has brought!” she muttered. “They have nothing to do but drive about—everyone has to come poking round our way.”

Displeased she sank into her chair again, once more fixing her anxious gaze on the copse, seeing nothing around her. And there was plenty for her to see—the landscape changed continually. The air of midday, laden with the sun’s sultry rays, was becoming close and heavy.

Now the sun hid itself. It was dark. The woods, the distant villages, the grass, all were shrouded in a kind of sinister neutral tint.

Anna Pavlovna came to herself with a start. Oh, heavens! From the west, like some live monster, there extended a hideous black stain, shot at the edges with coppery hues and advancing rapidly upon village and copse, as if on vast outstretched wings. All nature grieved. The cows drooped their heads, the horses shook their tails, dilated their nostrils, neighed, and tossed their manes. The dust beneath their feet did not rise, but scattered heavily, like sand, beneath the wheels of the carriages. The cloud approached menacingly. Soon a distant hum rolled slowly ever nearer.

All was quiet, as if in expectation of something extraordinary. Where were those birds so lately fluttering and singing in the sunshine? Where were the insects which had hummed in such a variety of strains in the grass? Everything was hushed and hidden, even inanimate nature seemed to share the ominous forebodings. The trees ceased their tossing and jostling of one another's twigs, and seemed to draw themselves up. The only motion in them was the occasional bending towards one another of their summits, as if whispering to one another a warning of the imminent danger. The cloud had by now muffled the horizon and was forming a leaden, impenetrable dome. The villagers were making for their homes with all possible speed. There was a moment of solemn, universal silence. And then, from the woods, came a fresh breeze, like a herald, cooling the face of the traveller, rustling the leaves, banging the gate of the hut on its way, and, whirling the dust of the street, sinking to rest in the bushes. Immediately after it sped a violent whirlwind, slowly driving a column of dust along the road. Now it

came bursting upon the village, knocking down a few rotten boards in fences, lifting a thatched roof, whipping the skirts of a peasant woman carrying water, and driving the cocks and hens before it down the street, their tail feathers aflutter.

It passed. Again silence. All was bustle, everything tried to take shelter. Only a foolish ram in the middle of the street had no forebodings, but went on chewing the cud indifferently and staring in front of it, knowing nothing of the general alarm. A feather and a straw bowled along the road, as if trying to catch up with the whirlwind.

Two or three big drops of rain fell—and suddenly there was a flash of lightning. An old man got off the bench where he had been sitting, and hastily propelled his little grandchildren into the hut. An old woman, crossing herself, shut the window quickly.

The thunder broke out, drowning with its imperious rolling all other noise. A terrified horse tore itself loose from its tether and galloped round the field with the rope trailing, pursued vainly by a peasant. And the rain came pouring, thrashing, faster and faster, drumming on roofs and windows, louder and louder. A delicate white hand timidly put some flowers—the objects of tender solicitude—out on a balcony.

At the first clap of thunder Anna Pavlovna crossed herself and went in.

“No good expecting him today,” she said with a sigh. “He’s probably sheltering from the storm ... but he might come towards evening.”

Suddenly there was the sound of wheels, but not from the copse—from the opposite direction. Someone drove into the yard. Anna Pavlovna’s heart stood still.

"Why from there?" she wondered. "Could it be he wanted to take me by surprise? No, no, there's no road there!"

She didn't know what to think, but soon all was explained. A minute later Anton Ivanich appeared. His hair was now frosted with silver, and he had put on weight, his cheeks were flabby from idleness and overfeeding. He wore the same overcoat and the same wide trousers.

"I've been waiting and waiting for you, Anton Ivanich," said Anna Pavlovna. "I thought you weren't coming—I was in despair."

"How could you think that? If it were anyone but you, now! You can't get me to go just anywhere—but to *you*! I was delayed through no fault of my own—you know I only use one horse now."

"How is that?" asked Anna Pavlovna absently, moving up to the window.

"Why, you see the piebald has been lame ever since the christening at Pavel Savich's. That coachman of theirs—perdition take him!—had the bright idea of laying the old door of the barn across the ditch ... they're poor folk, you see, they hadn't any new boards. And there was a nail or a hook or something left on the door, the devil knows what! The moment the horse stepped on the boards it shied, and almost broke my neck. The careless idiots! And it's been lame ever since. Some people are such skinflints! You wouldn't believe what their house is like! Why, any alms-house is better kept! And every year they spend some ten thousand rubles in Moscow, on Kuznetsky Most!"

Anna Pavlovna listened to him absent-mindedly, and shook her head slightly when he had finished.

"I've had a letter from Sashenka, Anton Ivanich!" she burst out. "He says he'll be here about the twentieth—"

and I'm so happy I don't know what to do with myself."

"So I heard, my dear! Proshka told me, at first I couldn't make out what he was trying to say. I thought he was here already. I'm fairly sweating with delight."

"God keep you, Anton Ivanich, for your love for us!"

"Of course I love you! Why, I dandled Alexander Fyodorich in my arms! He's just like my own!"

"Thank you, Anton Ivanich! God will reward you! I haven't slept these two nights and I don't let the servants sleep. Supposing he was to arrive and we all asleep—that would be a fine thing, wouldn't it? Yesterday and the day before I went to the copse on foot and I would have gone today, but that accursed old age has got the better of me. I'm worn out with sleeplessness. Sit down, Anton Ivanich. Why, you're wet through! Won't you have something to drink, some breakfast? Dinner may be late, for we must wait for the beloved guest."

"Well, just a bite! As for breakfast, you know, I must admit that I've breakfasted."

"Where did you manage to do that?"

"I stopped at Marya Karpovna's on the way. I passed them, anyhow, you know. I did it more for the horse than for myself. I had to give it a rest. No joke rattling for twelve versts in this heat. And once I was there, I had a bite. A good thing I didn't listen to them, and stay, try as they did to keep me, otherwise the storm would have held me up the whole day."

"Well, how is Marya Karpovna?"

"Quite well, thank God! She sends you greetings."

"Much obliged. And how's her daughter, Sophia Mikhailovna and her husband, how are they?"



"They're all well, my dear. The sixth child is on the way. It's expected in about a fortnight. They asked me to come round about that time. And such poverty in the house—I can hardly bear to go there! You'd think they had enough children—but no!"

"Really?"

"I assure you. All the doors are crooked, the floor boards move wherever you step, the roof leaks. And no money for repairs, and all you get for dinner is soup, curd-pies, mutton—nothing more. And yet you should see how they press you to come!"

"She used to be after my Sashenka, the old crow."

"As if she was a match for an eagle like him! I can't wait till I see him! A handsome fellow he is, I wager! Let me see, Anna Pavlovna—hasn't he got himself engaged to some princess or countess, oh, and isn't he now coming to ask for your blessing and invite you to the wedding?"

"Anton Ivanich!" exclaimed Anna Pavlovna, overcome with joy.

"I'm sure of it!"

"Oh, you darling—God give you health! Oh, I almost forgot! I meant to tell you—I knew there was something, but I kept forgetting—what a good thing you said that, I should never have remembered. Will you have breakfast first, or shall I tell you now?"

"Just as you like, my dear—while I'm having breakfast would do. I won't miss a bite ... I mean a word."

"Well, then," began Anna Pavlovna, when breakfast had been brought in and Anton Ivanich was seated at the table. "I dreamed—"

"Aren't you going to have anything yourself?" interrupted Anton Ivanich.



"As if I could think of eating! The food would stick in my throat. I couldn't even finish my cup of tea this morning. Well, then, I dreamed I was sitting like this, and opposite me stood Agrafena with a tray in her hands. And I said to her, 'Agrafena,' I said, 'why is your tray empty?' And she didn't say anything but kept looking at the door. 'Dear me,' I said to myself, in my dream, 'why is she staring over there?' And then I looked myself—and suddenly Sasha came in looking ever so sad, and he came up to me and he said, as plain as if it wasn't a dream, 'Good-bye, Mamma,' he said. 'I am going far away, over there,' and pointed to the lake. 'And I shall never come back again,' he said. 'Where are you going to, my love?' I asked him and my heart fairly ached. He didn't say anything but just looked at me, very strangely and pitifully. 'And where have you come from, my darling?' I asked him then. And he sighed, the dear, and pointed to the lake again. 'From the slime,' he said, very low. 'From the slime.' Then I began to shake all over, and woke up. My pillow was wet with tears. And for a long time I couldn't get over it! I sat up in bed, crying my heart out. When I got up I at once lit the icon-lamp in front of the Kazan Mother of God. May she, our merciful protectress, keep him from all misfortunes and calamity! So many doubts flocked into my mind, dear God. I can't make out what it means. Could something have happened to him? Such a storm!"

"Why, it's lucky to cry in a dream! It's a good omen," said Anton Ivanich, crushing his egg on his plate. "He's sure to be here tomorrow."

"And I was wondering if we shouldn't go to the copse after breakfast, to meet him. We'd get there somehow. But now, look at all that mud!"

"No, he won't be here today. I've had a sign that he won't."

Just at that moment the wind brought the distant tinkling of a bell, and again all was silence. Anna Pavlovna caught her breath.

"Oh," she cried, giving vent to a sigh. "And I was thinking."

Again the tinkling.

"Oh God, oh God—can it be a bell?" she said, rushing out on to the balcony.

"No," said Anton Ivanich, "it's the foal pasturing somewhere near, it has a bell on its neck. I noticed it on my way. I shooed it off, or it would have wandered into the rye. Why don't you have it hobbled?"

Suddenly the bell seemed to be tinkling right under the balcony and the sound grew louder and louder.

"Oh, dear, it is, it is! It's coming here! It's he, it's he!" cried Anna Pavlovna. "Run, Anton Ivanich! Where's everybody? Where's Agrafena? There's nobody here! He might as well be coming to a strange house, dear God!"

She was almost frantic. The bell seemed to be tinkling in the room now.

Anton Ivanich jumped up from the table.

"It's he, it's he!" he cried. "That's Yevsei on the box! Where's your icon, and the bread and salt? Get them, quick! What shall I take out to him in the porch? He must be met with bread and salt—it's an omen. Why can't you do things properly? Who would have thought it? And you, Anna Pavlovna, why do you stand there, why don't you go to meet him? Run, run!"

"I can't," she brought out with difficulty. "My legs won't move!"

With these words she sank on to a chair. Anton Ivanich snatched a piece of bread from the table, placed it on a plate, added the salt-cellar, and rushed to the door.

"Nothing prepared!" he scolded.

But at the very door he was met by three menservants and two maids, rushing in.

"He's coming! He's coming! He's here!" they shouted, as pale and terrified as if it were highwaymen who had come.

Immediately after them appeared Alexander himself.

"Sashenka, my dear one!" exclaimed Anna Pavlovna, but checked herself and looked at Alexander in astonishment. "Where's Sashenka?" she asked.

"Here I am, Mamma!" he said, kissing her hand.

"Is it you?"

She gazed at him intently.

"Is it really, really you, my beloved?" she repeated, embracing him.

Then she suddenly took another look at him.

"But what's the matter with you? Are you ill?" she asked anxiously, still holding him in her embrace.

"I'm quite well, Mamma."

"Well, just look at yourself, my darling! Is that how I sent you away?"

She pressed him to her heart and wept bitterly. She kissed his head, his cheeks, his eyes.

"Where is your hair? It was like silk," she moaned through her tears. "Your eyes shone like two stars, your cheeks were like milk and roses. You were like a ripe apple. Oh, those bad men, they have tortured you, they envied your looks and my happiness! What was your uncle thinking about? I gave you into his care, thinking him a man of sense. He didn't look after my treasure! My darling!"

The old woman wept and showered caresses on Alexander.

"So it's not always lucky to dream of tears!" thought Anton Ivanich.

"Why are you howling over him as if he were dead?" he whispered. "Don't do that! It's unlucky."

"Greetings, Alexander Fyodorich," he said. "God has willed that we should meet again on this earth."

Alexander gave him his hand in silence. Anton Ivanich went to see if everything had been taken out of the carriage and then went to summon the household servants to greet their master. But they were already crowding the hall and the entrance. Anton Ivanich made them line up and showed them how to behave—who was to kiss the master's hand, who his shoulder, who the hem of his coat, and what they were to say at the same time. One lad he drove right away, saying, "First go and wash your face and wipe your nose."

Yevsei, belted with a strap and covered with dust, exchanged greetings with the other servants, who came crowding round him. He handed out his Petersburg gifts—a silver ring for this one, a birch snuff-box for that. When he caught sight of Agrafena he stood as if transfixed and looked at her in silent, sheepish ecstasy. She looked at him sideways, frowning, but the next moment her expression involuntarily changed, and she first laughed for joy, then almost cried, and again turned aside scowling.

"Why don't you say something?" she said. "Block-head! You don't even say a word of greeting to me!"

But he could not speak. He went up to her with the same sheepish smile on his face. She hardly allowed him to give her a hug.

"What brings you here?" she said crossly, darting furtive looks at him, but her eyes and her smile showed how great her joy was. "I suppose they've turned your and your master's head in Petersburg. Look at the moustache you've grown!"

He produced a small cardboard box from his pocket and handed it to her. In it was a pair of brass ear-rings. Then he took a parcel containing a big shawl out of the bag.

She seized it and thrust both gifts into the wardrobe without looking at them.

"Show us your presents, Agrafena Ivanovna!" said some of the servants.

"What is there to show? Haven't you ever seen a present before? Off with you! What are you crowding round here for?" she shouted.

"And here's some more!" said Yevsei, handing her another parcel.

"Show us, show us!" they insisted.

Agrafena tore off the paper and several packs of cards fell out, used but still almost new.

"Couldn't you find anything better?" said Agrafena. "You think I have nothing to do but play cards! The idea! What an idea—as if I would play with you."

But she put away the cards too. An hour later Yevsei was once more seated in his old place, between the table and the stove.

"Lord, what peace!" he said, stretching and bending his knees. "There's no place like home! We had a dog's life over there in Petersburg! Haven't you anything for me to eat, Agrafena Ivanovna? We haven't had a bite since the last stopping-place."

"So you haven't given up your old habits? Here you are! Look how he falls on it! I can see you haven't been fed at all!"

Alexander passed through all the rooms, and then through the garden, stopping at every bush, at every bench. His mother accompanied him. Looking into his pale face she sighed, but was afraid to weep; Anton Iva-

nich had frightened her. She questioned her son about his life, but could not get at the cause of his having become so thin and pale, and having lost so much of his hair. She offered him food and drink, but he would not touch anything, saying that he was tired after his journey and wanted to sleep.

Anna Pavlovna went to see if his bed had been made properly, scolded the maidservant because it was hard, made her do it all over again while she looked on, and did not go away till Alexander had lain down. She went out of the room on tiptoe, adjuring the servants, with many threats, not to dare to speak, not even to breathe too loud, and to take off their boots. Then she sent for Yevsei, who came accompanied by Agraphena. Yevsei bowed low to his mistress and kissed her hand.

"What's happened to Sashenka?" she demanded fiercely. "Why does he look so ill, eh?"

Yevsei said nothing.

"Why don't you answer?" said Agraphena. "Don't you hear what the mistress says?"

"Why is he so thin?" asked Anna Pavlovna. "Where has his hair gone to?"

"I cannot say, Madam," said Yevsei. "It's the master's business."

"You can't say! And where were you all this time?"

Yevsei, not knowing what to reply, said nothing.

"Look who you trusted in, Madam," put in Agraphena, gazing affectionately at Yevsei. "As if he were any good! What did you do there? Come on, tell the mistress! You'll get it!"

"And didn't I do my best, Madam?" said Yevsei timidly, glancing from his mistress to Agraphena. "I served him with all my might—ask Arkhipich."

"Who's Arkhipich?"

"The yardman there."

"Hark to him!" cried Agrafena. "Take no notice of him, Madam! Lock him up in the shed, he'll soon find something to say."

"I'm ready to serve the will of my masters through thick and thin," continued Yevsei. "May God strike me dead! I will swear on the icon."

"You can all talk," said Anna Pavlovna, "but when it comes to deeds, where are you? I can see how you looked after your master! You let my darling lose his health. Looked after him! You'll get it!"

She threatened him with an uplifted finger.

"I didn't look after him, Madam? In eight years only one of his shirts has been lost, even the worn-out ones are all there."

"And where was it lost?" asked Anna Pavlovna fiercely.

"At the washerwoman's. I told Alexander Fyodorich at the time to deduct it from the bill, but he didn't say anything."

"The hussy!" said Anna Pavlovna. "I suppose she was tempted by such good linen."

"I didn't look after him!" repeated Yevsei. "If only every one did his duty as well as I! Why, very often while he was still asleep I would run to the baker's."

"What sort of rolls did he eat?"

"White ones, very good."

"I know they were white—but were they made from raised dough?"

"The dunce!" said Agrafena. "Hasn't a word to say for himself, and he from Petersburg!"

"No, no!" said Yevsei. "Plain dough."

"Plain! You rascal, you! You miscreant, you robber!" cried Anna Pavlovna, crimson with rage. "You couldn't



even think to buy rolls made from raised dough! And you say you looked after him."

"But he never told me to, Madam!"

"Never told you! He doesn't care what you put in front of him, my darling, he'll eat anything! And it never came into your head. D'you mean to say you forgot that he always ate bread from raised dough here? Buying plain rolls! No doubt you put the money away somewhere. I'll give it you! Well, what else, tell me."

"After he had his tea," continued Yevsei, much subdued, "he went to his office and I to cleaning the boots. I cleaned them the whole morning, all of them, three times over sometimes. And when he took them off in the evening I cleaned them again. *I* didn't look after him, Madam! Why, I never saw such boots on any other gentleman! Pyotr Ivanich's boots weren't so well cleaned, and they have three menservants!"

"But why does he look so ill?" asked Anna Pavlovna, somewhat mollified.

"It must be from the writing, Madam."

"Did he write a lot?"

"A lot—every day."

"What did he write—papers?"

"It must have been papers."

"And you didn't try to stop him?"

"I tried, Madam. 'Don't sit there, Alexander Fyodorich,' I said. 'Why don't you go out? It's lovely weather, ever so many gentlemen are out walking. What's the good of all this writing? You'll ruin your lungs. Your Mamma will be angry.'"

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Get out! You're a fool!' he said."

"And so you are a fool!" commented Agrafena.

At this Yevsei glanced at her, and then turned his gaze upon his mistress again.

"And didn't his uncle try to stop him?" asked Anna Pavlovna.

"He, Madam! If he found the master not doing anything when he came he would be at him at once. 'What,' says he, 'doing nothing? This isn't the country,' says he. 'You must work,' says he, 'and not lie about! Always dreaming!' says he. And he'd go on and on scolding him."

"Scolding him!"

"'Provincial,' says he, and he'd go on and on, scolding him so that sometimes it made me sick to hear him."

"A curse on him!" said Anna Pavlovna, and she spat vehemently. "He should have had little rogues of his own to scold. He should have held him back instead of—Dear Lord, Heavenly Father! Who is one to trust nowadays when one's own kin are worse than the wild beasts? A dog looks after its puppies, but an uncle leads his own nephew astray! And you, you poor fool, couldn't tell him not to dare to yelp at your master, to leave my boy alone! Why didn't he shout at his wife, the wench! He found the right person to nag at, 'Work, work!' Let him wear himself out with working! A hound, a hound, God forgive me! Trying to make a slave of my boy!"

After this silence ensued.

"Has Sashenka been so thin for a long time?" she resumed.

"Three years," replied Yevsei. "Alexander Fyodorich became very down-hearted, ate badly, and suddenly grew so thin, so thin, wasting away like a candle."

"What made him down-hearted?"

"God alone knows, Madam! Pyotr Ivanich spoke to him about it. I tried to listen to what he said, but it was no good. I couldn't understand it."

"Well, and what was it he said?"

Yevsei thought a moment, his lips moving, apparently trying to remember.

"He called him something ... but I've forgotten what."

Anna Pavlovna and Agrafena looked at him, waiting impatiently for his reply.

"Well," said Anna Pavlovna.

Yevsei said nothing.

"Say something, you dolt," added Agrafena. "The mistress is waiting."

"Dis ... dis ... illusioned," brought out Yevsei at last.

Anna Pavlovna looked in astonishment at Agrafena, Agrafena looked at Yevsei, Yevsei looked from one to the other, and none of them spoke.

"What?" asked Anna Pavlovna.

"Dis ... dis ... illusioned, that was it, I remember now," said Yevsei firmly.

"And what sort of affliction is that? Heavens! Is it an illness?" asked Anna Pavlovna dismally.

"It doesn't mean depraved, does it, Madam?" asked Agrafena hurriedly.

Anna Pavlovna turned pale and spat.

"Hold your tongue!" she said. "Did he go to church?"

Yevsei showed signs of embarrassment.

"I can't say he went so very often, Madam," he faltered. "I might almost say he never went. Gentry don't go to church much, there."

"So that's it," said Anna Pavlovna, sighing and crossing herself. "It seems my poor prayers were not enough for the Lord. Dreams never deceive—he really has been in the slime, my darling!"

At this moment Anton Ivanich came to her.

"Dinner's getting cold, Anna Pavlovna," he said. "Isn't it time to wake Alexander Fyodorich?"

"No, no, for God's sake!" she replied. "He asked us not to wake him. 'Eat by yourselves,' he said. 'I have no appetite. I'd better sleep,' he said. 'Sleep will strengthen me—perhaps I may feel like eating in the evening.' And you, Anton Ivanich, don't be angry with an old woman like me! I'll go and light the icon-lamp and say a prayer while Sashenka sleeps. I don't feel like eating. But you eat by yourself."

"Very well, my dear, very well, I will. You can rely on me."

"And will you be so kind," she continued, "you are our friend, you love us—send for Yevsei and try and find out from him why Sashenka has grown so grave and so thin, and where his hair has gone to. You're a man, it'll be easier for you. I wonder if anyone was unkind to him there? You know what a lot of bad people there are in the world—find out everything."

"Very well, my dear, very well! I'll get it out of him, I'll ferret out the truth. Send Yevsei to me while I'm having dinner, I'll do everything you ask me."

"Hullo, Yevsei," he said, seating himself at the table and tucking his napkin into his collar. "How are you?"

"Greetings, Sir. What sort of a life was ours? But a poor one! Now you have got fine and stout here."

Anton Ivanich spat.

"Don't tempt Providence, brother—anything may happen," he said and started on the cabbage soup.

"Well, how did you get on there?" he asked.

"Nothing special—not very well."

"The food was good, I suppose. What did you eat?"

"What did I eat? I used to go to the shop and buy brawn and cold pie—and that was my dinner."

"To the shop? Didn't you have your own stove?"

"We didn't do any cooking at home. Bachelor gentlemen never do there."

"Fancy!" exclaimed Anton Ivanich, laying down his spoon.

"It's true—the master had his dinners sent in from the tavern."

"A gipsy life. No wonder he's thin. Here, drink up!"

"Thank you humbly, Sir! Your health!"

Silence ensued. Anton Ivanich went on eating.

"How much are cucumbers there?" he asked reaching for one.

"Forty kopeks for ten."

"No, really?"

"Really, really! Why, it's a disgrace to say it, Sir, but sometimes pickled cucumbers were sent from Moscow."

"Oh heavens! How could anyone help getting thin?"

"You'd never see one like that there," went on Yevsei, pointing to a cucumber. "Not in your sleep, you wouldn't. Miserable little objects. You wouldn't so much as look at them, and the gentry eat them there. There are very few houses, Sir, where they bake their own bread. And as for storing cabbage or salting beef, or pickling mushrooms—why, there's no such thing!"

Anton Ivanich shook his head but said nothing, for his mouth was as full as he could cram it.

"T'chk, t'chk," he said, when he had got it all down.

"You buy everything at the shop, and what you can't find there you get at the sausage-shop, or else at the pastry-cook's. And if it isn't at the pastrycook's you go to the English shop. And the French shop has everything."

Silence.

"Well, and what do sucking-pigs cost?" asked Anton Ivanich, helping himself to almost half a sucking-pig.

"I couldn't say, Sir. We never bought one. Very dear, about two rubles, I believe."

"Ai, ai, ai! How could any one help getting thin? How expensive!"

"The gentry don't eat it much—only the officials."  
Again silence.

"Well—and so it was bad there," suggested Anton Ivanich.

"Bad, God knows! Why, the beer there is thinner than the kvass here. And as for the kvass it seems to rumble in your stomach all day. The only thing that is good there is the boot-polish. You never saw such boot-polish! And how it smells—good enough to eat."

"No, really?"

"Upon my word!"

Silence.

"Well, and how was it?" asked Anton Ivanich after a pause for mastication.

"Nothing special."

"The food was bad."

"Very bad. Alexander Fyodorich hardly ate at all—he quite lost the habit of eating. Didn't eat a pound of bread at dinner."

"Just try not to get thin!" said Anton Ivanich. "And all because it was expensive!"

"It was expensive, and people don't eat their fill there every day. The gentry eat on the sly-like, once a day, if they have the time, at five o'clock, or sometimes even six. But generally they just have a bite and that's all. Eating is the last thing they think of—first they do all their business, and only then eat."

"What a life!" said Anton Ivanich. "Just try not to get thin! It's a wonder you didn't both die! And is it like that all the time?"

"Oh, no! You should see the gentry, when they get together on holidays! They dine in some German tavern,

and they say they eat up a hundred rubles' worth. And how they drink, my God! Even more than we poor fellows! Once at Pyotr Ivanich's—the guests arrived, sat down to table about six o'clock, and only got up at four in the morning."

Anton Ivanich stared.

"Really!" he said. "Eating all the time?"

"Eating all the time."

"I'd like to see that—it's not our way! And what do they eat?"

"Why, it's nothing much to look at, Sir. You don't know what you're eating. The Germans put God knows what into the food, you wouldn't want to touch it! Even their pepper is different. They pour stuff from all sorts of foreign phials into the sauce. Pyotr Ivanich's cook once gave me a taste of what he serves to the gentry, and I was sick for three days. I saw there was an olive in it, and I thought it was just an olive, like we eat them here. I tasted it, and what do you think—there was a tiny fish in it. I was disgusted and spat it out. I took another, just the same thing! And the same everywhere, damn them!"

"And do they put it in on purpose?"

"God alone knows! I asked, and the fellows laughed, and said, 'They grow like that.' And what food! First they give the soup, all very nice, with pies, but pies not much bigger than a thimble. You put half a dozen into your mouth at once, and before you start chewing them there's nothing left, as if they had melted. After the soup all of a sudden comes the sweet course, and then beef and after that ice-cream, and then some sort of green-stuff, and then again roast meat.... I couldn't touch it!"

"So you didn't cook at home! No wonder he's thin!" remarked Anton Ivanich, getting up.



"Thanks to you, my God," he said aloud, sighing deeply, "for feeding me with divine blessings ... oh my, what am I saying ... earthly blessings, and for not depriving me of your heavenly kingdom." Then he addressed Yevsei.

"Clear the table. The master and mistress will not dine. Order another sucking-pig for the evening—or perhaps there's a turkey. Alexander Fyodorich used to like turkey. I should think he must be hungry. And now bring me some fresh hay to the attic. I'll rest for an hour or two. You can wake me for tea. If Alexander Fyodorich so much as stirs ... give me a push."

After he had slept he sought out Anna Pavlovna.

"Well, Anton Ivanich?" she asked.

"Thanks, my dear, my humble thanks for your bread and salt ... and I've had a good sleep. The hay was so fresh, so fragrant...."

"You're welcome, Anton Ivanich! Well, and what does Yevsei say? Did you question him?"

"Of course I did. I got it all out of him. It's nothing. It'll all pass. It all comes from the food there being so bad."

"The food?"

"Yes. Judge for yourself! Cucumbers forty kopeks for ten. Sucking-pig two rubles, and all the dishes from the pastrycook's—and never eating one's fill. No wonder he got thin! Don't worry, my dear, we'll put him on his legs here, we'll cure him. Have plenty of birch-cordial made. I'll give you the recipe. I got it from Prokofy Astafich. You can give him one or two wine-glasses morning and evening, and there'll be no harm in giving it him before dinner, too. You can serve it with holy water. Have you any?"

"Yes, yes! You brought us some yourself."

"So I did! Give him his food as rich as possible. I ordered sucking-pig or turkey for supper."

"Thank you, Anton Ivanich."

"Don't mention it, my dear. Shouldn't you order pullets with white sauce, as well?"

"I will."

"Why should you trouble? What am I for? I'll see to it—do let me."

"Do—help me, dear friend!"

He went out of the room and she remained deep in thought.

Her woman's instinct and mother's heart told her that food was not the chief cause of Alexander's dejection. She concocted all sorts of skilful hints in her own mind, but Alexander refused to understand them, and said nothing. Two or three weeks passed in this way. Vast quantities of sucking-pigs, pullets and turkeys were consumed by Anton Ivanich but Alexander was as thin and grave as ever, and his hair did not grow.

Then Anna Pavlovna decided to be frank with him.

"Sashenka, my dear," she said one day. "You've been here a month now and I have never once seen you smile. You walk about like a dark cloud, and look on the ground all the time. Is it that you find nothing to please you in your native parts? I suppose you liked it better away from home. Is that what you're pining for? It breaks my heart to look at you. What's the matter with you? Tell me—what do you lack? I will spare nothing to get it for you. Has anyone done you wrong? I'll see to that, too."

"Don't you worry, Mamma," said Alexander. "It's nothing, really. I've grown older, become more thoughtful, that's what makes me so serious."

"But what has made you so thin? And where has your hair gone to?"

"I can't answer that—it's impossible to tell all that happened in eight years. Perhaps my health has suffered a little."

"Where do you feel pain?"

"I feel pain here, and here." He pointed first to his head and then to his heart.

Anna Pavlovna put her hand on his forehead.

"No fever," she said. "What could it be? Do you have shooting pains in your head?"

"Oh, no, I just—"

"Sashenka, let's send for Ivan Andreich."

"And who's Ivan Andreich?"

"The new apothecary. He came here two years ago. He's a marvel! He hardly ever prescribes any medicine. He just makes up some tiny pills himself, and they help. Foma here had the stomach-ache—he bellowed for three days and nights, and three of Ivan Andreich's pills cured him instantly. Go to the doctor, my darling."

"No, Mamma, he won't be able to help me. It'll pass of itself."

"But what makes you so sad? What has come over you?"

"Oh, nothing."

"What is it you want?"

"I don't know myself. I just feel sad."

"What can it be, dear Lord?" said Anna Pavlovna. "You say you like the food, you have every comfort, you rank high.... Anybody'd think that was enough.... And you are sad. Sashenka," she said softly, after a pause, "isn't it time for you to get married?"

"What? Oh, no, I shall never marry."

"And I have such a nice girl in my eye for you—as pretty as a doll, rosy, sweet. So delicate and feminine! Such a small waist, so slender! She's been to boarding school in the town. Seventy-five souls and twenty-five

thousand in money, and a splendid *trousseau*, all made in Moscow. And nice relations. Eh, Sashenka? I've already spoken to her mother over a cup of coffee, just put in a joking word, you know. She seemed to be in raptures at the idea."

"I shall never marry," repeated Alexander.

"What, never?"

"Never."

"Great heavens! What will come of it? Everybody behaves like everybody else, all except you. What's the matter with you? How happy I should be if the Lord willed that I should dandle my grandchildren. Come, do marry her! You'll fall in love with her."

"I shall not fall in love, Mamma. I've got over all that."

"Got over falling in love and not married? Who did you fall in love with there?"

"A girl."

"Why didn't you marry her?"

"She betrayed me."

"Betrayed you? But you weren't married to her!" Alexander made no reply.

"Fine girls over there—loving before they marry! Betrayed you, the nasty thing! Happiness went begging to her and she couldn't appreciate it, the worthless chit! If I were to see her I'd spit in her face, I would! What was your uncle thinking about? Where could she find someone better, I should like to know! But she's not the only one, is she? You can fall in love another time."

"I did, Mamma."

"Who with?"

"A widow."

"Well, and why didn't you get married?"

"This time it was I who betrayed her."

Anna Pavlovna looked at Alexander and could think of nothing to say.

"Betrayed," she repeated. "I suppose she was some immoral creature," she whispered. "Slime! Slime! God forgive me. Loving before the wedding, without the church service—betraying! The things that go on in this world when you look closer! It must mean the end of the world is near! Come now, tell me, isn't there anything you want? Perhaps the food isn't to your liking. I'll send for a *chef* from the town."

"No, thank you. Everything's all right."

"Perhaps it's lonely for you all alone. I'll invite the neighbours."

"No, no. Don't worry, Mamma! I like it here, it's peaceful, it'll pass.... I haven't had time to look around me yet."

And that was all Anna Pavlovna could get out of him.

"Ah," thought she, "we cannot take a step without God."

She invited Alexander to go to church with her in the nearest village, but twice he overslept, and she could not bring herself to wake him. Then she asked him to go with her to vespers one evening. "All right," said Alexander and off they went. The mother entered the church and stood right up against the choir-stalls. Alexander remained at the door.

The sun was setting, its slanting rays playing over the gilded frames of the icons, lighting up the austere dark countenances of the saints, putting to shame the feeble and uncertain flickering of the candles. The church was almost empty. The peasants were at work in the fields, and there were only a few old women in white kerchiefs, huddled in a corner near the entrance. Some of them, with sad faces, their cheeks propped on their hands, sat on the stone step of a side-chapel, heaving loud, prolonged sighs every now and then, either for their own sins, or

their domestic affairs. Others, prostrate on the ground, lay face downward for a long time, praying.

A fresh breeze blew through the iron bars in the windows, lifting the cloth on the altar, playing in the priest's grey hair, shuffling the pages of his book and extinguishing a candle. The steps of the priest and the clerk resounded on the stone floor through the empty church. Their voices rose dismally to the domed roof. Overhead in the cupola, the rooks cawed loudly and the sparrows chirped as they flew from one window to another, and the noise of their wings and the tolling of the bells sometimes drowned the words of the service.

"So long as the vital forces of a man are at their height," thought Alexander, "so long as his desires and passions have free play, he lives the life of the senses, fleeing the soothing, profound and solemn contemplation to which religion leads us. He turns to it for consolation with exhausted, fading powers, vanished hopes and the burden of years."

Gradually the sight of so many familiar objects aroused reminiscences in Alexander's soul. He passed in review his childhood and youth up to his departure for Petersburg, remembered how, as a child, he had repeated the prayers after his mother, how she had told him of the guardian angel who watches over the human soul, ever warring against the Evil One, how, pointing to the stars, she had told him that they were the eyes of God's angels who looked down at the earth and counted the good and bad deeds of human beings, and that the dwellers in heaven weep when the account shows more evil than good deeds and rejoice when the good exceeds the evil. Pointing to the blue distance of the horizon she used to tell him it was Zion.... Alexander emerged from these reminiscences with a sigh.

"If only I could still believe all that!" he thought. "The infantile faith has been lost and what new, true things have I learned? None. I have found doubts, interpretations, theories ... and am still further than before from the truth. What's the good of this dissension, this philosophizing! My God! When the warmth of faith no longer warms the heart, how can one be happy? Am I happier than I used to be?"

After vespers Alexander returned still sadder than he had been when he left home. Anna Pavlovna did not know what to do. One morning, waking up rather earlier than usual, he heard a rustling beside his pillow. Looking up he saw an old woman standing over him, her lips moving in a whisper. She disappeared instantly as soon as she saw that she had been noticed. Under his pillow Alexander found some herbs or other—and there was an amulet round his neck.

"What's the meaning of this?" Alexander asked his mother. "Who was that old woman in my room?"

Anna Pavlovna showed some confusion.

"That was ... Nikitishna," she said.

"Who's Nikitishna?"

"She ... now don't be angry with me!"

"What is it? Tell me!"

"They say she helps lots of people.... She only whispers over some water and breathes on a person when he's asleep, and everything passes."

"Two years ago," put in Agrafena, "a fiery snake came down the chimney of the widow Sidorikha's house."

Anna Pavlovna spat to avert the Evil One.

"Nikitishna," continued Agrafena, "laid a spell on it and it stopped coming."

"And what about Sidorikha?" asked Alexander.



"She gave birth to a child. The baby was so thin and dark. It died in three days."

Alexander laughed for perhaps the first time since his return to the country.

"Where did you get her?" he asked.

"Anton Ivanich brought her," replied Anna Pavlovna.

"How can you listen to that old fool?"

"Fool? Oh, Sashenka, how can you? Aren't you ashamed? Anton Ivanich a fool? I wonder you can bring yourself to say such things! Anton Ivanich is our benefactor, our friend."

"Here, Mamma, take the amulet and give it to our friend and benefactor. Let him put it round his own neck."

From this moment he took to locking himself into his room at night.

Two or three months passed. Gradually solitude, quiet, home life and all the material blessings accompanying it helped Alexander to put on weight. And idleness, freedom from responsibility and the absence of all moral shocks whatever, instilled in his soul the peace he had so vainly sought in Petersburg. There, fleeing from the world of ideas and art, confined within four walls, he had hoped to sleep the sleep of the dormouse, but had been continually aroused by envy and impotent desires. Every phenomenon in the world of science and art, every new celebrity had aroused in him the question, "Why is this not I?" There, at every step, he had encountered people with whom he could not help comparing himself unfavourably ... there, he had slipped so often, had seen, as in a mirror, all his failings ... there, was his imperturbable uncle, criticizing his way of thinking, his slothfulness, his utterly groundless conceit. There was the elegant world, the handful of gifted men, amidst whom he played no role whatsoever. Finally, there, people try to subject

life to certain conditions, to throw light upon its dark and obscure places, they do not give rein to the senses, passions and dreams, thus depriving life of its poetic allurements, and imposing upon it tedious forms, which are barren, monotonous....

And here—what freedom! Here he was better, cleverer than anyone else. Here, he was the idol of all for miles around. And here, wherever he went, his soul, confronted by the face of nature, yielded to peaceful, consoling impressions. The voice of the stream, the rustling of the leaves, the coolness, sometimes even the very silence of nature—all gave birth to thought, aroused sensation. In the garden, the fields, at home, he was haunted by reminiscences of childhood and youth. Anna Pavlovna, who sometimes sat beside him, seemed to guess at his thoughts. She helped him to bring back to life the trifles so dear to his heart, or related something he did not remember at all.

"Those lime trees there," she said, pointing to the garden, "were planted by your father. I was expecting. I would sit here on the balcony and watch him. He worked a bit and then looked at me, and the sweat came pouring down his face. 'Ah, you're here,' he would say, 'no wonder I'm enjoying my work so!' and then he would start again. And there's the meadow where you used to play with the village children. You were so high-spirited. If the slightest thing upset you, you would bawl your head off. Once Agashka—she's married to Kuzma now, his is the third hut from the end of the village street—gave you a push, and your nose bled, and you were bruised. Her father thrashed her and thrashed her, I could hardly stop him!"

Alexander mentally supplemented these memories with others. Over there on that bench, he told himself,

I used to sit with Sophia and was happy then. And over there, between the two lilac bushes, I kissed her for the first time.... It all seemed to be going on before his eyes. He smiled at these memories and sat on the balcony by the hour, greeting the sun when it rose, bidding it farewell when it set, listening to the birds singing, the lake splashing on the shore, and the humming of invisible insects.

"God, how good it is here!" he would cry under the influence of these fleeting impressions. "Far from vanities, from that petty life, that ant-hill, where people

*... In swarms, hemmed in,  
Breathe not the cool of morn,  
Nor verdure of the fields.*

"How weary one gets of life there, and how one's soul rests here, in this simple, unsophisticated life. The heart renews itself, one breathes more freely, the mind is not tormented by anguished thoughts and wearisome conflicts with the heart—they are in harmony. Here there is nothing to think about. One is carefree, with no sad thoughts, heart and mind are drowsy; one's glance moves lightly from copse to ploughed fields, from ploughed fields to hillside, and then loses itself in the infinite azure."

Sometimes he would go up to the window and look out on the yard and the village street. There the picture was different, a Teniers canvas, full of busy domestic life. Barbos lay in front of his kennel, overcome by the heat, his nose on his front paws. Half a dozen hens greeted the morning, clucking in turns. Cocks fought. The herd was driven through the street to pasture. Sometimes a cow, falling behind, lowed dismally, standing in the middle

of the road and looking all round. Men and women with rakes and scythes on their shoulders went to work. Every now and then the breeze carried a word or two up to the window. A farm wagon rumbled thunderously over the little bridge, and after it a load of hay crawled lazily past. Boys, with coarse, flaxen hair, wandered about the puddles, lifting the hem of their shirts. Regarding this scene Alexander began to grasp the poetry of the *grey sky, the broken fence, the wicket gates, the muddy pond, the folk-dance*. He changed his elegant tight-fitting frock-coat for a loose, home-made dressing-gown. And in every manifestation of this peaceful life, in every impression, in the morning, in the evening, at meals and during rest-time, the vigilant eye of maternal love was present.

His mother could scarcely contain her joy to see Alexander beginning to put on weight, the colour returning to his cheeks, the peaceful light coming back to his eyes. "But the hair will never grow any more," she said, "and it used to be like silk!"

Alexander often took walks in the neighbourhood. Once meeting a crowd of women and girls, going to the woods to look for mushrooms, he made one of their company, and spent the whole day with them. When he got home he praised a girl called Masha for her simplicity and agility, and Masha was taken into the house *to look after the master*. Sometimes he went to look on at the work in the fields, and learned from experience the things he had so often written about and translated for the magazine. "What a lot of lies we used to tell," he thought, shaking his head, and he began to look more steadily and deeply into things.

One day of bad weather he sat down to write, and was extremely pleased with the beginning he had made. He needed some book for reference—he sent to Petersburg

for it, and the book came. He began working in earnest. More books were sent for. Anna Pavlovna tried in vain to persuade him not to write, or he would ruin his lungs. He took no notice whatever. She sent Anton Ivanich to him, but Alexander would not heed even him, and went on writing. When three or four months had passed and, far from getting thinner from all this writing, he was actually fatter, Anna Pavlovna's fears were calmed.

Thus passed a year and a half. Everything seemed to be going well, but at the end of this time Alexander again fell serious. He had no desires at all, or if he had any they were such as were easily satisfied. They never went beyond the domestic circle. There was nothing to worry him—neither cares, nor doubts—and yet he was bored. Gradually he grew tired of the narrow domestic circle. His mother's solicitude became tiresome, and as for Anton Ivanich, he was sick of him. He was sick of work, too, and nature no longer charmed him.

He was sitting silently at the window, glancing indifferently at his father's lime trees, and listening with irritation to the lapping sound of the lake. He began to seek the cause of this new melancholy, and discovered that he was pining for ... Petersburg. Now that he was so far from the past he began to regret it. The blood still raced in his veins, his heart beat, body and soul demanded activity. More problems! He almost wept at this discovery. He had hoped his melancholy would pass, that he would get used to country life, but nothing of the sort—the longer he lived there the worse his heart ached, and once again he craved for the slime he knew so well.

He had reconciled himself to the past—it had become sweet in memory. Hostility, morose looks, grimness, unsociability were all softened by solitude, by meditation. The past appeared before him cleansed and puri-

fied, the traitress Nadenka herself was almost haloed with light. "And what am I doing here?" he asked himself peevishly. "Why should I wither away? Why should my gift fade into insignificance? Why should I not shine there by my work? I have become more reasonable. In what way is my uncle better than I am? Am I incapable of finding a path for myself? Say I have not managed to, so far, I undertook what was not for me—what of it? I have now come to my senses. The time has come. But how my departure will afflict my mother! And yet I simply must go! I cannot stay here and perish. One person, and another—all have made their way there. And my career, my fortune? I alone lag behind—and what for? Why?" He was restless with melancholy, and did not know how to break to his mother his intention of going away.

But his mother soon relieved him of this burden—she died. And here at last is what he wrote to his uncle and aunt in Petersburg.

To his aunt:

"Before my departure from Petersburg, *ma tante*, you pronounced, with tears in your eyes, words which have been engraved on my memory. You said, 'If ever I needed warm friendship, sincere sympathy, there would always be a corner in your heart for me.' The moment has come for me to understand the full value of these words. The share you have so generously given me in your heart is for me a pledge of peace, quiet, consolation, tranquillity, perhaps happiness, for the whole of my life. Three months ago my mother died—I will not add a single word. You know from her letters what she was for me and will understand what I have lost in losing her. I shall now flee this place for ever. And whither should I, lonely pilgrim, direct my steps, but to that place where you are? Tell me one word—shall I find you the same as I left you a year



and a half ago? Have you driven me out of your memory, I wonder? Will you undertake the tedious task of healing by your friendship, which has more than once saved me from grief, a fresh, deep wound? I place all my hope in you and in another powerful ally—activity.

“You are surprised, are you not? It seems strange to you to hear this from me. To read lines written in a calm tone so unlike myself. Do not be surprised, and do not fear my return. It is not a madman, a dreamer, a disillusioned being, or a provincial who is coming back to you, but simply a man like those of which Petersburg is full, such a one as I ought to have become long ago. Mind you assure my uncle, in particular, of this! When I look back on my life I am covered with confusion, ashamed both before others and in my own eyes. But it could not have been otherwise. And see how late I have come to my senses—at the age of thirty! The hard school through which I passed in Petersburg, and my meditations in the country, have made my destiny quite clear to me. Keeping my uncle’s lessons and my own experience at a respectful distance I have pondered over them here, in solitude, and now see more clearly where they should long ago have led me, and how wretchedly and irrationally I digressed from my true aim. Now I am at peace. I do not torture myself, but I do not boast of this. Perhaps this peace only comes from egoism as yet. But I feel sure my outlook will clear up to such an extent that I shall discover new and purer sources of peace. I cannot help still regretting that I have, alas, come to the dividing line where youth ends and the time of meditation, testing and analysis of all emotions, the time of consciousness begins.

“Although my opinion of others and of life may perhaps not have changed very much, many hopes have vanished, many desires left me, in a word, I have lost my



illusions. Consequently, there are not many people or things left for me to be mistaken about or deceived in, and that is extremely consoling in its way. And so I have a clearer vision of the future. The worst is behind me. Emotions are no longer alarming, for very few remain to me. The chief ones have been outlived and I bless them. I am ashamed to remember how, imagining myself a martyr, I cursed my lot in life. Cursed! What miserable puerility and ingratitude! How late I have understood that suffering purges the soul, that it alone makes a man tolerable both to himself and others, that it elevates him! I admit now that not to know suffering is not to know the fullness of life. It contains many important elements, the significance of which we perhaps shall not see in this world. I see in these emotions the hand of Providence, which, it seems, sets humanity the infinite task of progressing, achieving an aim imposed from above, while incessantly struggling with deceptive hopes and maddening obstacles. Yes, I see how necessary this struggle, these emotions are, how without them life would not be life, but stagnation, a dream.... When the struggle ends, lo! life, too, ends. When a man is busy, he loves, enjoys, suffers, feels, goes about his business, he lives.

"See how I argue! I have emerged from the shadows and see that my whole life up to now has been a kind of painful preparation for the true path, a wise lesson for the remainder of life. Something tells me that the rest of the way will be easier, calmer, clearer. The dark places have been lit up, the intricate knots have become unravelled. Life begins to appear a blessing and not an evil. Soon I shall again be saying: how good life is! But I shall say it, not as a youth drunk with fleeting pleasures, but in the full consciousness of its true joys and sorrows. And then death itself will hold no terrors—it will no

longer be a bogey, but a splendid experience. A calm hitherto unknown to me is already making itself felt within me. The puerile vexations, the outbursts of wounded vanity, the childish irritability and comic rage against the world and its inhabitants, like the rage of the puppy against the elephant, have all vanished.

"I have reconciled myself to those with whom I have long been at enmity—human beings—who, by the way, I would remark, are much the same here as in Petersburg, only cruder, coarser, absurder. But I do not criticize them here, either, and have long ceased to criticize those I met in Petersburg. Here is an example of my meekness: a certain crank called Anton Ivanich visits me, stays with me, presumes to share my grief. Tomorrow he will go to a wedding at some neighbours, and share their joy, and then to some other place, where he will perform the function of a kind of midwife. Neither grief nor joy prevents him from eating four times a day wherever he is. I see that it is all one to him—whether a man dies, is born, or weds, and I regard him without disgust, without irritation. I bear with him and do not drive him away. A good sign this, is it not, *ma tante*? What will you say on reading this self-praise of mine?"

To his uncle:

"My dear, kindest of uncles, and at the same time Your Excellency!

"With what joy I learned that your career has been crowned with success. You have wrung success from fortune. You are a councillor of state, you are the head of a government office. Dare I remind Your Excellency of the promise you gave me when I left? 'If you ever require a post and an occupation, or money, come to me,' you said. And now I need both post and occupation, not to mention money! The poor provincial ventures to ask for

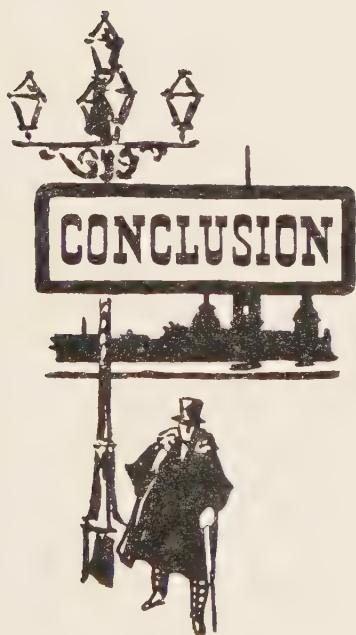
a post! What will be the fate of my request? Will it be that which once met Zayezhalov's letter, in which he asked you to see to his affairs? As for literature, which you were so cruel as to refer to in one of your letters—are you not ashamed of reminding me of long-forgotten follies, when I myself blush for them? Oh, Uncle, oh, Your Excellency! Who has not been young and more or less foolish? Who has not cherished strange secret aspirations destined never to come true? Take my neighbour here, to the right of me—he fancied himself a hero, a Nimrod, a mighty hunter in the face of the Lord ... he thought to astonish the world with his achievements ... and it all ended in his retiring with the rank of ensign, never having been at the war, and peacefully cultivating potatoes and sowing turnips. My other neighbour, to the left, dreamed of remaking the whole world, including Russia, according to his own ideas, but, after spending some time copying out documents in a government office, has returned home, and to this day has been unable to repair his old fence. I myself believed I was endowed with the creative gift, and longed to confide new secrets to the world at large, never suspecting that they were secrets no longer, and that I was no prophet! We are all ridiculous, but who would attempt without blushing for himself to brand these youthful, noble, passionate, if not very reasonable dreams as disgraceful? Who has not, in his day, cherished futile desires, imagined himself performing valiant deeds, composing some triumphant song, earning some resounding appellation? Whose fancy has not carried him back to fabulous, heroic periods? Who has not wept in sympathy with the lofty and the beautiful? If such a man exists, let him throw the first stone at me—I do not envy him! I blush for my youthful dreams, but after all I revere them! They are the pledges of purity of

heart, the sign of a noble soul, <sup>as</sup> aspiring to what is good.

"I know these arguments will never convince you. You require something definite, practical. Well, here it is—tell me how talent would be recognized and developed if the young were to suppress in themselves these early tendencies, if they did not give freedom and space to their dreams, but slavishly followed the path laid down, without testing their powers! And, finally, is it not a law of nature that youth should be restless, excitable, sometimes eccentric, always foolish, and that in time such dreams die down, as they have in my case? Were these errors, then, unknown to your own youth? Look back, seek in your memory! I can see you shake your head, your glance, as always, calm and imperturbable, as you say, 'Nothing of the kind!' But allow me to trip you up here—what about love? Will you deny it? You cannot. The clues are in my hand. Remember I have been able to investigate the matter on the spot. The theatre of your amorous adventures is before my eyes—this lake! The yellow blossoms still grow there. One of them, dried and pressed, I have the honour to send Your Excellency hereby, as a tender souvenir. But there is a still more terrible weapon against your denunciation of love in general, and of my love in particular, and that is a document. You frown? And what a document! You turn pale. I stole these withered relics from my aunt's no less withered breast, and shall bring them with me as an eternal clue incriminating you, and as a defence of myself. Tremble, Uncle! And this is not all—I know in detail the whole history of your love. Every day, at breakfast and at supper, before going to bed, my aunt tells me some interesting detail. I intend to gather up all this precious material in a special memorandum. I shall not fail to hand it to you person-

ally, together with a work on agriculture on which I have been occupied for the last year. For my own part I consider it my duty to assure my aunt of what she is pleased to describe as the unchangeableness of your feelings. When I am so fortunate as to receive from Your Excellency a favourable reply to my request, I will have the honour of appearing before you with a gift of dried raspberries and honey, and with a few letters which my neighbours promise to give me, stating their needs—all but Zayezhalov, who died before his case was completed."











nd here, four years after Alexander's second arrival in Petersburg, is what happened to the principal characters in this novel.

One morning Pyotr Ivanich paced up and down the floor of his study. This is not the former brisk, stout, well-built Pyotr Ivanich, with his imperturbable glance, his proudly held head, and erect carriage. Whether from age or circumstances, he seems to have deteriorated. His movements are no longer so lively, his glance not so firm and confident, as before. Numerous grey hairs shine in his whiskers and on his temples. It is obvious that he has passed his fiftieth year. He stoops a little in his walk. But strangest of all is to see on the face of this calm, stern man, as we have so far known him, an expression which is more than careworn, which is almost dejected, although it has in it something that is peculiarly characteristic of Pyotr Ivanich.

He seemed to be in a state of perplexity. Taking two steps he suddenly stood still in the middle of the room, or again started rapidly pacing the room, as if visited by unaccustomed thoughts.

Seated in an armchair not far from the writing-table was a stout man of middle height, with a cross on his

chest suspended from a ribbon, in a tightly buttoned frock-coat, his knees crossed. All that he lacked was a stick with a big gold handle, that familiar stick by which the reader immediately recognizes the doctor in old novels and stories. This stick, with which he roams about for want of anything better to do, or sits by the hour at bedsides, comforting the patients and not seldom uniting in himself two or three roles—the doctor, the practical philosopher, the friend of the house, and so on—may be highly appropriate to a doctor. This is all very well where people live at their ease, with plenty of space round them, where people are seldom ill, and where the physician is more of a luxury than a necessity. But Pyotr Ivanich's physician was a Petersburg doctor. He did not know what it was to walk, though he prescribed exercise for his patients. He was a member of some council, the secretary of some society, a professor, medical adviser to several government departments, and to the poor, and was invariably summoned to take part in consultations. Besides this he had a huge practice. He seldom removed the glove from his left hand and would not have taken it off the right one either but for the need of taking pulses. He never unbuttoned his coat and seldom sat down. He had already crossed and uncrossed his knees several times impatiently. It was high time for him to go, but Pyotr Ivanich said nothing. At last:

"What's to be done, Doctor?" asked Pyotr Ivanich, suddenly stopping in front of him.

"Go to Kissingen," replied the doctor. "It's the best thing you can do. Your attacks have become too frequent."

"Oh, you are still thinking about me!" Pyotr Ivanich interrupted. "I'm talking about my wife. I'm over fifty and she's in the prime of life, she wants to enjoy herself. And if her health has begun to break down since—"

"Break down?" said the doctor. "I only spoke of my fears for the future, at present there's nothing. I only meant to say that her health—or rather not her health—she ... seems to be in a state that is not quite normal."

"It's the same thing! You merely let slip a remark, and forgot all about it, but since then I have been watching her closely and every day I discover fresh, disturbing changes in her—and I have known no peace for three months. How it is that I never noticed anything before, I can't understand. My work and business take up all my time and health ... and now, perhaps my wife—"

He again took to pacing the floor.

"Did you examine her today?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes, but she has not noticed anything herself. At first I supposed there was some physiological cause—she has never had any children. But there doesn't seem to be any. The cause is probably purely psychological."

"Worse still," remarked Pyotr Ivanich.

"And it may be nothing. There are absolutely no suspicious symptoms. You know what it is—you have lived here too long in this marshy climate. Go to the south. Have a rest, accumulate fresh impressions, and see what comes of it. Spend the summer in Bad Kissingen, taking the waters, the autumn in Italy, the winter in Paris. I assure you, you have an unusual accumulation of mucus which the waters will cause to disappear."

Pyotr Ivanich scarcely heard him.

"Psychological cause," he said under his breath, and shook his head.

"I'll tell you why I say psychological," said the doctor. "A person who didn't know you might suspect some sort of troubles—at least not troubles, but suppressed desires. Sometimes there is need, deprivation, I only wanted to draw your attention—"

"Need, desires!" interrupted Pyotr Ivanich. "Her every desire is forestalled! I know her tastes, her habits! Need—h'm.... You see our house, you know how we live."

"A fine house, a splendid house!" said the doctor. "Wonderful—er—*chef*, and what cigars! Has that friend of yours who lives in London stopped sending you sherry? I don't remember seeing it on your table this year."

"How ironical fate can be, Doctor! Was ever anyone so solicitous for his wife as I?" said Pyotr Ivanich with unwonted ardour. "I may say I have always weighed every step ... and now everything is shattered and at such a moment! After such success, such a career! What have you to say to that?"

He made a gesture of despair and resumed his pacing.

"What makes you so nervous?" asked the doctor. "There is absolutely no danger. I repeat what I said the first time—her constitution is sound, there are no destructive symptoms. Anaemia, a certain weakness—that's all."

"A mere trifle!" said Pyotr Ivanich.

"Her symptoms are negative, not positive," continued the doctor. "And is she the only one? Look at all the people who live here, but are not Petersburg-born! They're all in a bad state! Take her away, take her away! And if you can't do that, distract her, don't let her stay at home too much, amuse her, make her go out! More exercise for body and soul! Both are in an unnaturally comatose state in her. Of course in time it might settle in the lungs or—"

"Good-bye, Doctor. I am going to her," said Pyotr Ivanich and hastened his steps towards his wife's room.

At the door he stopped, parting the curtains softly and fixing an anxious glance on his wife.

What was it that the doctor had noticed about her? Anyone seeing her for the first time would have thought

her a woman like so many other women in Petersburg. Pale, it is true, her glance a little dim, the gown falling loosely and evenly over her narrow shoulders and flat bosom, her movements slow, almost languid. But rosy cheeks, shining eyes and impetuous movements have never been the distinguishing marks of our beauties. And beauty of form? Neither Phidias nor Praxiteles would have found a model for Venus among them.

No, it is not grace which must be sought in our northern beauties! They are not statues. Not theirs are the classical poses which immortalize the beauty of Grecian women, nor the irreproachable contours which make these poses possible. Voluptuousness does not stream from their eyes in ardent rays, there is not the naïvely sensual smile on their parted lips which burns on those of southern women. Our women have been endowed with another, a higher beauty. The sculptor's chisel has never fixed the gleam of thought impressed upon their features, the struggle 'twixt will and passion, the play of inexpressible movements of the soul and innumerable subtle mischievous nuances, assumed simplicity, anger and good nature, hidden joys and sufferings ... all those fleeting flashes of lightning from the over-intensity of the soul.

However this may be, no one seeing Lizaveta Alexandrovna for the first time would have noticed anything wrong with her. Only one who had known her before, who remembered the freshness of her countenance, the sparkle of her glance, making it difficult to determine the colour of her eyes, drowned as they were in voluptuous, changing waves of light, who remembered her plump shoulders, and graceful bosom, would now have looked at her in painful surprise, his heart aching with pity, unless he were a mere stranger, as now perhaps Pyotr Ivanich's heart ached, though he was afraid to admit it to himself.

He went softly into the room and sat down beside her. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"I am looking through my accounts," she said. "Fancy, Pyotr Ivanich, we spent about a thousand five hundred rubles on food alone last month! Why, it's a disgrace!"

Without answering a word he took the account-book from her and laid it on the table.

"Listen!" he said. "The doctor thinks my illness will get worse here, he advises going abroad for the waters. What do you say to that?"

"What can I say? In this case I suppose the doctor's word carries more weight than mine. You must go since he advises it."

"And what about you? Would you like to make this voyage?"

"I wouldn't mind."

"Perhaps you'd rather stay here?"

"Very well, I'll stay."

"Which would you rather?" asked Pyotr Ivanich not without impatience.

"Do as you like—for yourself and for me," she answered in dreary indifference. "I'll go if you say so, if not, I'll stay here."

"You can't stay here," said Pyotr Ivanich. "The doctor says your health too has suffered slightly ... from the climate."

"What makes him think so?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "I'm quite well, there's nothing wrong with me."

"A long voyage might exhaust you, though," said Pyotr Ivanich. "How would you like to stay with your aunt in Moscow while I'm abroad?"

"I don't mind. I can easily go to Moscow."

"Or should we both go to the Crimea for the summer?"

"That would be nice, too."



Pyotr Ivanich could stand no more. He got up from the sofa and began pacing the floor as he had done in his study, and then stopped in front of her.

"Is it all the same to you where you are?" he asked.  
"Quite."

"But why?"

She did not answer, but picked up the account-book again.

"You can say what you like, Pyotr Ivanich," she said, "but we shall have to retrench—a thousand five hundred rubles on food alone."

He took the book from her and threw it under the table.

"Why does it worry you so?" he asked. "Do you grudge the money?"

"How can I help worrying? Am I not your wife? You taught me yourself ... and now you reproach me for worrying.... *I'm doing my work.*"

"Listen to me, Liza," said Pyotr Ivanich after a short pause. "You are trying to change your nature, to force yourself—that's not right. I have never compelled you. You will not convince me that this sort of thing"—he pointed to the account-book—"can interest you. Why worry yourself? I allow you complete freedom."

"My God! What's the use of freedom to me?" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "What should I do with it? Up till now you have always disposed both of yourself and me so well, so wisely, that I have forgotten I have a will. Go on for the future. I don't need freedom."

They were both silent.

"It's a long time," resumed Pyotr Ivanich, "since I heard any request from you, the expression of any desire or whim."

"I need nothing," said she.

"Have you no particular ... secret desires?" he asked kindly, looking steadily at her.

She seemed to hesitate.

Pyotr Ivanich noticed this.

"Tell me! For God's sake, tell me!" he said. "Your desires shall be my desires, they shall be my law!"

"Very well," she said, "if you would do this for me, put an end to our Fridays—these dinners fatigue me."

Pyotr Ivanich paused for thought.

"As it is, you live the life of a hermit," he said. "And when our friends stop coming to us on Fridays you will be utterly solitary. But since you wish it—it shall be done. What will you do with yourself?"

"Give me all your bills and account-books and things—I'll see to them," she said, trying to reach under the table to pick up the account-book.

To Pyotr Ivanich this seemed mere clumsy dissembling.

"Liza!" he said reproachfully.

The account-book remained under the table.

"I was thinking you might revive some of our old acquaintances which we have quite dropped. And I should like you to give a ball, so that you should have some amusement, start going out yourself—"

"Oh, no, no!" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna in alarm. "For God's sake, don't do that! A ball—what an idea!"

"Why does it upset you so? At your age a ball should be still enjoyable. You're still young enough to dance."

"Pyotr Ivanich, don't do that, I beg you!" she exclaimed eagerly. "To bother about a new frock, to dress, to receive a crowd, to go visiting—God forbid!"

"Do you want to live in a dressing-gown your whole life?"

"Yes—if you didn't mind, I'd wear nothing else.

Why dress up? Expenses and unnecessary trouble for no good reason!"

"I'll tell you what," said Pyotr Ivanich. "They say Rubini is to come here this winter. We shall have a permanent Italian opera. I've asked them to reserve us a box—what d'you say to that?"

She said nothing.

"Liza!"

"You shouldn't have," she said uncertainly. "I think I should find that exhausting too. I get tired."

Pyotr Ivanich, his head on one side, went up to the mantelpiece, and leaned his elbow on it, looking at her ... how shall we say? Not exactly sadly, but with alarm, with anxiety.

"Liza, why this —" he began and broke off, not liking to pronounce the word "apathy."

He looked long at her in silence. In her blank, lifeless eyes, in her face, where there was no play of living thought or feeling, in her listless pose and slow movements, he read the cause of this apathy about which he feared to ask. He had guessed the reply as soon as the doctor hinted at his fears. Then he had searched his memory and realized that, in systematically shielding his wife from all *which might injure their marital interests*, he had failed to offer her compensation for those joys, perhaps unlawful, which she might have known outside the domestic circle, that her home had become a kind of fortress, rendered unalluring by the *régime* he had devised, surrounded by closed paths and guards which rendered impossible the most legitimate outpourings of feeling.

The regularity and aridity of his relations with her had deteriorated without his knowledge or will into cold, subtle tyranny—and over what? The heart of a woman. For this subjection he had paid her with wealth, luxury,

with all the external conditions of happiness, as he visualized it—terrible error, the more so that it arose not from ignorance, not, he was sure, from a coarse interpretation of the heart, but from neglect and egoism. He had forgotten that *she* neither went to work nor played cards, that *she* had no factory, that exquisite food and the best wine have very little value in the eyes of women, and that the life he had forced upon her was thoroughly uncongenial.

Pyotr Ivanich was a kindly soul. He would have given anything, if not from love for his wife, then from a sense of justice, to set the evil right. But how was this to be done? He had spent more than one sleepless night since the doctor had expressed fears as to his wife's health, in trying to find some way of reconciling her heart to the present situation and reviving her fading powers. And now, standing leaning against the mantelpiece, he was still thinking about this. The thought came to him that perhaps the germ of a dangerous disease was hiding within her, that she was oppressed by a hollow, insipid life.

A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He sought desperately for remedies, at the same time feeling that their invention required the heart rather than the head. And where was he to find the heart for this? Something told him that if he could fall at her feet, take her in a loving embrace and tell her in passionate tones that he lived for her alone, that all his labours, cares for a career, his thriftiness, had been for her alone, that his system of behaviour had been inspired solely by the ardent, insistent, jealous desire to win her heart.... He realized that such words would have sufficed to bring back to life a corpse, that she would instantly blossom out into health and happiness, and there would have been no need to go abroad for the waters.

But to say and to prove are two very different things. To prove all this the passion must really exist. And Pyotr Ivanich, searching his soul, could not find in it the slightest trace of passion. All that he felt was that his wife was necessary to him, and this was true enough, but it was on a level with the other necessities of life, had become necessary from habit. Perhaps he would not have objected to pretending, to playing the role of a lover, ridiculous as it would be at fifty years to suddenly use the language of passion, but how can one deceive a woman with passion, when there is no passion? Would he command enough heroism and skill to bear this burden on his shoulders to the extent required for satisfying the heart's demands? And would not her wounded pride be finally crushed when she discovered that that which, a few years before, would have been a magic potion for her was now being offered her as a remedial draught? No, after weighing the pros and cons of this last step he found himself unable to make up his mind to it. He thought of trying to do the same thing in a different way, since this was necessary and had now become possible. For three months he had been pondering an idea which had formerly seemed to him absurd, but now matters were different. He had saved it up in case of emergency, the emergency had arisen, and he decided to carry out his plan.

"If this doesn't help," he thought, "then there is no way out. I will try it, come what may!"

Pyotr Ivanich approached his wife with firm steps and took her by the hand.

"You know the part I play at the office, Liza," he said. "I am considered the most efficient official in the department. It is highly probable that my name will be proposed for privy councillor this year and of course they will make me one. Do not think that this will be the end of

my career—I can still advance ... and I would, if—”

She looked at him in astonishment, wondering what he was leading up to.

“I never doubted your ability,” she said. “I am perfectly sure that you will not stop half-way but will go forward to the end.”

“No, I will not. In a few days I shall hand in my resignation.”

“Your resignation?” she repeated in astonishment, sitting up.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Let me tell you. As you know I have bought out my partners and the works belong to me alone. They bring me in about forty thousand, clear profit, without the slightest trouble. They go as smoothly as a machine.”

“I know—what about it?” asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

“I shall sell them.”

“Sell them, Pyotr Ivanich! What’s come over you?” asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna with ever increasing astonishment, regarding him with terror stricken eyes. “Why should you? I’m overwhelmed, I can’t understand!”

“Cannot you really?”

“No,” said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, surprised.

“You can’t understand that, seeing how unhappy you are, how your health suffers ... from the climate, I am ready to give up my career and my works and to take you away from here ... that I should wish to devote the rest of my life to you? Surely you don’t think me incapable of sacrifice, Liza?” he added reproachfully.

“So it’s for me!” said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, recovering her equanimity with difficulty. “No, Pyotr Ivanich,”

she said excitedly, deeply agitated. "For God's sake, don't make any sacrifices for me! I won't accept them—d'you hear me? I just won't! For you to stop working, making a name, getting rich—and because of me! God forbid! I am not worthy of the sacrifice! Forgive me—I have been too shallow, too insignificant, too weak, to understand and appreciate your lofty aims, your noble labours.... You needed a different sort of wife."

"Magnanimity again!" said Pyotr Ivanich, shrugging his shoulders. "My mind is made up, Liza!"

"Oh God, oh God, what have I done? I have been a stumbling-block to you! I am in your way! What a strange fate mine has been!" she added, almost in despair. "If a person does not want to live, ought not to live ... surely God will have pity and take me! To interfere with you—"

"You are quite wrong if you think this sacrifice is hard for me. I have had enough of this rigid life. I need rest, peace. And where should I find peace but alone with you? We will go to Italy."

"Pyotr Ivanich," she said almost in tears, "you are good, generous.... I know you are capable of generous hypocrisy. But perhaps the sacrifice would be useless, perhaps it is ... too late, and you will be throwing up your career."

"Spare me, Liza, and don't follow up that thought!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "Otherwise you will see that I am not made of stone ... I repeat, I do not want to go on living by the head alone. Not everything in me is quite frozen, yet."

She gazed at him steadily, incredulously.

"And is this ... sincere?" she asked, after a pause. "You really do want peace, you are not going away solely for my sake?"

"No—for my own, too."

"Because if it's for me, I wouldn't for the world—"



"No, no! I'm ill, tired ... I need a rest."

She gave him her hand. He kissed it warmly.

"So we'll go to Italy," he said.

"Very well, let's," she replied dully.

A weight seemed to fall from Pyotr Ivanich's shoulders. "Now we'll see!" he thought.

They sat on for a long time not knowing what to say to one another. There is no knowing who would first have broken this silence if they had remained alone longer. But hurried steps were heard in the next room. Alexander appeared.

How he had changed—how fat, bald and rosy he had become! With what dignity he bore his rounded belly and the star on his chest! His eyes sparkled with joy. He kissed his aunt's hand with particular feeling and pressed his uncle's hand.

"Where have you sprung from?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"Guess!" said Alexander meaningly.

"You seem to be in wonderful spirits today," said Pyotr Ivanich, looking at him inquiringly.

"I bet you anything you'll never guess," said Alexander.

"I remember you coming to see me like this eleven or twelve years ago," remarked Pyotr Ivanich. "You even broke something on my table—I guessed at once then that you were in love, but now ... surely not again? No, it can't be! You're too clever to—"

He glanced at his wife and fell suddenly silent.

"You can't guess?" asked Alexander.

His uncle looked at him and tried to think.

"You're not going to ... get married, are you?" he said uncertainly.

"Quite right!" exclaimed Alexander triumphantly. "Congratulate me!"

"And who is the lady?" asked his uncle and aunt together.

"Alexander Stepanich's daughter."

"Indeed! Well, she'll be a wealthy bride," said Pyotr Ivanich, "and her father—what does he say?"

"I've just come from them. What could her father have against me? He listened to my proposal with tears in his eyes. He embraced me and said he could now die in peace, and that he knew whom to entrust his daughter's happiness to. 'Follow in your uncle's footsteps,' he said."

"Is that what he said? You see! Uncle helped even here!"

"And what did his daughter say?" asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"Oh, she ... like all girls, you know," replied Alexander. "She didn't say anything, only blushed. And when I took her hand her fingers seemed to be playing the piano in mine ... as if they were trembling."

"Didn't say anything?" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "D'you mean to say you never took the trouble to find out her feelings before proposing? Don't you care? What are you getting married for?"

"What d'you mean? Am I to go on like this all my life? I'm sick of living alone! The time has come, *ma tante*, to settle down, to set up a home, to fulfil my duty. The girl's pretty and rich. Uncle here will tell you why people marry. He explains it all so clearly."

Pyotr Ivanich tried to stop him with a furtive gesture, but Alexander took no notice.

"Supposing she doesn't like you!" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "Supposing she cannot love you—what have you to say to that?"

"What am I to say? You speak better than I do, Uncle,

so I'll quote your own words," he went on, not noticing his uncle's uneasy movements and significant coughs. "‘Marry for love,’" said Alexander, "‘love passes and you will live by habit. Marry not for love and you will get the same result—you will get used to your wife. Love is one thing, and marriage is another. These two things do not invariably coincide and it is better that they never should.’ It's true, isn't it, Uncle? It's what you taught me."

He looked at Pyotr Ivanich but suddenly checked himself, seeing the fierce glance which his uncle cast at him. His mouth open, in astonishment, he glanced at his aunt and back at his uncle, and fell silent. Lizaveta Alexandrovna shook her head pensively.

"So you're going to get married!" said Pyotr Ivanich. "Just at the right time and may God bless you! And you wanted to marry at twenty-three!"

"Youth, Uncle, youth!"

"Of course it was youth!"

Alexander who seemed to have been lost in thought suddenly smiled.

"What are you smiling at?" asked Pyotr Ivanich.

"Nothing. A certain absurdity came into my head."

"What?"

"When I loved," replied Alexander thoughtfully, "my marriage did not come off."

"And now you are going to get married, but the love won't come off," contributed his uncle and they both laughed.

"From this it follows, Uncle, that you are right in considering habit the chief—"

Again Pyotr Ivanich made a fierce face at him. Alexander stopped talking, not knowing what to think.

"To marry at thirty-five," said Pyotr Ivanich, "is the right way. But remember the convulsions you were

thrown into, how you roared, how unequal marriages infuriated you, when the bride is borne like a victim, adorned with flowers and diamonds, and pushed into the embraces of an elderly man, for the greater part an ugly, bald fellow. Show us your head!"

"Youth, youth, Uncle! I didn't understand what the essence of the matter was," said Alexander, smoothing his hair with the palm of his hand.

"The essence of the matter," continued Pyotr Ivanich. "Remember how much in love you were with that, what's her name?—Natasha, wasn't it? 'Mad jealousy, impulses, divine bliss.' Where's all that gone to?"

"Uncle, Uncle, that'll do!" said Alexander, blushing.

"Where are the vast passion, the tears?"

"Uncle!"

"What? No more yielding to 'sincere effusions,' enough of plucking yellow blossoms? Now it's—'I'm tired of living alone'!"

"For that matter, Uncle, I can prove that I am not the only one who has loved, raged, been jealous, wept ... wait a minute, I have it here in writing."

He took out his pocket-book and after searching for some time among the papers in it, extracted an ancient, yellowing tattered sheet of paper.

"Look at this, *ma tante*," he said. "A proof that my uncle was not always such a rational, sarcastic and sober person. He too once indulged in *sincere effusions*, and wrote them out, not on office paper, and in a special kind of ink. I have carried this scrap of paper about for four years, waiting for a chance to catch my uncle un-awares. I would have forgotten all about it if you hadn't reminded me yourself."

"Nonsense! I don't know what you're talking about," said Pyotr Ivanich, casting a glance at the paper.

"Well, then, take a look!"

Alexander held up the paper to his uncle's eyes. Pyotr Ivanich's countenance suddenly darkened.

"Give it to me, Alexander!" he cried, trying to snatch at the tattered fragment. But Alexander jerked back his hand. Lizaveta Alexandrovna watched them both with curiosity.

"No, Uncle, not I!" said Alexander. "Not till you admit here, in front of my aunt, that you too were once in love, like me, like everyone else. If you don't I will leave this document in her hands as an eternal reproach to you."

"Barbarian!" shouted Pyotr Ivanich. "How can you treat me so?"

"You won't?"

"Very well! I was in love! Give it to me!"

"No, no! And you raged and were jealous?"

"Very well! I raged and was jealous," said Pyotr Ivanich, with a grimace.

"And wept?"

"No, I didn't weep."

"You did! My aunt told me! Admit it!"

"I can't say the words, Alexander. You'll make me cry in good earnest."

"*Ma tante!* Accept this document."

"Let me see it," she said, stretching out her hand.

"I wept, I wept, give it to me!" howled Pyotr Ivanich despairingly.

"Beside the lake?"

"Beside the lake."

"And plucked yellow blossoms?"

"I did! Devil take you! Give it to me!"

"That's not all. Give me your word of honour that you will consign to utter oblivion my follies and never taunt me with them again."

"My word of honour."

Alexander yielded up the tattered sheet. Pyotr Ivanich seized it, lit a match and burned it on the spot.

"At least tell me what it was," asked Lizaveta Alexandrovna.

"No, my dear, that's a thing I will not even mention at the last judgement," replied Pyotr Ivanich. "Surely it wasn't I who wrote that! It's impossible!"

"You, you, Uncle!" struck in Alexander. "I can tell you what was in it, I think. I know it by heart. 'Angel, my adored.'"

"Alexander! I shall quarrel with you forever!" cried Pyotr Ivanich angrily.

"Blushing as if it were a crime—and what for?" said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "For tender first love."

She shrugged her shoulders and turned away from them.

"There's so much that is ... silly in that sort of love," said Pyotr Ivanich gently, insinuatingly. "Why, there wasn't a hint of those sincere effusions, and flowers, and moonlight walks with you and me ... and yet you love me."

"Oh, I've got quite ... used to you," replied Lizaveta Alexandrovna absently.

Pyotr Ivanich stroked his whiskers thoughtfully.

"Well, Uncle," whispered Alexander, "isn't that just how it should be?"

Pyotr Ivanich winked at him as if to say, "Be quiet."

"It's one thing for Pyotr Ivanich to think and act like that," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna. "He's been that way a long time and I don't suppose anyone ever knew him any different. But from you, Alexander, I did not expect such a change."

She sighed.

"Why do you sigh, *ma tante*?" he asked.

"For the former Alexander," she replied.

"Surely, *ma tante*, you would not wish me always to be the person I was ten years ago," objected Alexander. "Uncle is right in calling that a foolish dream."

Pyotr Ivanich's countenance again grew fierce. Alexander said no more.

"No, not the person you were ten years ago," said Lizaveta Alexandrovna, "but the one you were four years ago. Do you remember the letter you wrote me from the country? How nice you were then!"

"As far as I remember I was still dreaming then," said Alexander.

"No, you weren't! You understood life then and gave your own interpretation of it. You were splendid, noble, wise.... Why didn't you stay like that? Why was it all only words, only on paper and not in deeds? The beautiful showed like the sun from behind a cloud, for one moment...."

"Do you mean, *ma tante*, that I am not wise ... and ... noble, any more?"

"God forbid! Not that! But now you are wise and noble in a different way ... not *my* way."

"What's to be done, *ma tante*?" said Alexander, heaving a loud sigh. "It's the age. I am abreast of the age—one can't lag behind. I refer you to my uncle, I quote his words."

"Alexander," said Pyotr Ivanich fiercely. "Come into my study for a moment. I have a word to say in your ear."

They went into the study.

"What possessed you to keep on quoting me today?" said Pyotr Ivanich. "Can't you see the state my wife is in?"

"What's the matter with her?" asked Alexander in alarm.



"Didn't you notice anything? Why, I'm resigning, giving up all my affairs, everything and going with her to Italy."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Alexander in astonishment. "Why, you'll be made a privy councillor this year!"

"Yes, but you see Madame Privy Councillor is in a bad way."

He paced the floor of his room three times in deep thought.

"Ah, well!" he said. "My career is over. The thing is done. Fate does not mean me to go any further. So be it!"

He threw out his hand in a gesture of despair.

"Let's talk about you instead," he said. "It appears you are following in my footsteps."

"It would be a good thing if I could," interposed Alexander.

"Yes," continued Pyotr Ivanich. "Collegiate councillor at a little over thirty, a good income from the state, you earn a lot of money on the side, and are marrying well just at the right age. Yes, the Aduyevs know their business. You're just like me—all but the pains in the back."

"I get them, too, sometimes," said Alexander, touching his own back.

"All that is, of course, very fine, but for the pains in the back," continued Pyotr Ivanich. "I admit I never thought any good would come of you when you first arrived. You had your head crammed with a lot of other-world notions, you were soaring in the heavens... but that's all passed over and thank God for it. I would like to advise you—go on following in my footsteps, but—"

"But what, Uncle?"

"Nothing ... I only wanted to give you a little advice ... about your future wife."

"Oh! That's interesting."

"On second thought I won't," said Pyotr Ivanich after a pause. "It might only make things worse. Do the best you can. Perhaps you'll find out for yourself. Let's talk about your marriage. They say your bride will have a dowry of two hundred thousand rubles—is it true?"

"Yes—two hundred thousand from her father, and her mother left her another hundred thousand."

"Why, that's three hundred thousand!" cried Pyotr Ivanich in awed tones.

"And he told me today that he would put all his five hundred souls at my disposal, I to pay him eight thousand annually. We shall live together."

Pyotr Ivanich jumped out of his chair with unusual liveliness.

"Wait a bit," he said, "you overwhelm me! Did I hear you aright? Say it again—how much?"

"Five hundred souls and three hundred thousand rubles," repeated Alexander.

"You're not joking?"

"Of course not, Uncle."

"And the estate ... isn't mortgaged?" asked Pyotr Ivanich softly, without stirring.

"No."

His uncle gazed respectfully, his arms folded, at his nephew for a few minutes.

"Career and fortune," he said almost as if speaking to himself, but still gazing at Alexander. "And what a fortune! And all of a sudden! Everything! Everything! Alexander," he added, proudly, solemnly, "you are of my blood, you are an Aduyev! It can't be helped—you must embrace me."

And they embraced.

"The first time, Uncle," said Alexander.

"And the last," replied Pyotr Ivanich. "This is an extraordinary event. And now do you mean to say you don't need any filthy lucre? Apply to me, if only once!"

"But I do, Uncle—I have so many expenses. If you could let me have ten or fifteen thousand."

"At last! For the first time!" cried Pyotr Ivanich.

"And the last, Uncle! Quite an unusual thing, by no means same old story!"

*1845-1846*



# **“BETTER LATE THAN NEVER”**

*(Excerpts from a Critical Article  
by I. A. Goncharov)*



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...This critical analysis of my books is based upon the preface I intended for the edition of *The Abyss* which was to be brought out in 1870, but was not then... published. In 1875 I returned to this preface, made certain additions, and again laid it aside.

Now, on rereading it, I consider it may serve as sufficient elucidation of, and reply to, the many remarks and questions addressed to me from various sources, both privately and in print, some of which were flattering, exaggerated praise, but most of which consisted in criticism, misunderstanding, reproaches, both as regards the general significance of my literary aims, and the characters and certain details in my books.

I am far from setting up this analysis of my work as a categorical critical criterion, I impose it upon no one, and even foresee that many of my readers will, for various reasons, disagree with much in it. My only desire in presenting it is that they should know how I myself regard my novels, and should accept it as my reply to the questions put to me, and that there should remain nothing more for anyone to ask me.

If my readers find that the key I have made to my own works is not the right one, they are welcome to choose one of their own making. If, contrary to my expectations, I should ever find myself compelled to republish my col-



lected works, this analysis may serve as the author's preface.

I may be told that I am rather late with such a preface; but if even now it does not seem superfluous, then—"better late than never."

...I will now approach the question of what I myself see in my three novels (*The Same Old Story*, *Obломov* and *The Abyss*.—*Tr.*), the question of their general significance.

I see ... *not three novels, but one*. They are all connected by a single thread, a single, consistent idea—the transition from one period of Russian life, known to me from personal experience, to another—each of them contains the reflection of insignificant phenomena in my imagination, in portraits, scenes and smaller details.

In the first place the following artistic principle must be borne in mind and expounded: if images are typical, they cannot fail to reflect, on a larger or smaller scale, the period in which they occur, for this is what makes them typical. In other words, the phenomena of social life, morals and manners are reflected in them, as in a mirror. And if the artist has sufficient depth himself, they will also display the psychological side of life. I hasten to remark that I make no pretensions to such depth, and modern critics have already remarked in print that I am shallow.

I myself, and the atmosphere in which I was born and bred and spent my life, are unconsciously reflected in my imagination, as a landscape is reflected through the window in a mirror, as a vast panorama is sometimes reflected in a small pond—the inverted bowl of the sky above the pond, with its design of clouds and trees, a hill-side, and the buildings on it, people, animals, movement and stillness—all in miniature likeness.

And this simple physical law is fulfilled in myself and my novels, in some way of which I am scarcely conscious.

While working on *The Same Old Story*, I naturally had in mind myself and many like myself, who received an education at home or at a university, lived in a back-water, beneath the wings of a kind mother, were abruptly torn away from this idyllic atmosphere, from hearth and home, and seen off with tears (as in the first chapters of *The Same Old Story*), next to appear on the main field of action—Petersburg.

Here, too—in the encounters between the dreamy nephew, cosseted in idleness and luxury, and the practical uncle—may be found the embryo of the theme then only just beginning to emerge against a background of the busiest place of all—Petersburg. This theme is the faint glimmerings of the consciousness that *work*—real work, not mere routine, but *active work* in contending against the stagnation prevailing all over Russia—was essential.

This was reflected in my tiny mirror in the life of average officialdom. There is not the slightest doubt that the same things, in the same spirit, tone and character, but on another scale, were going on in other spheres of Russian life, both higher and lower.

The exponent of this theme in society is the uncle. He has achieved a considerable position in his office, he is a financial director, a privy councillor, and in addition to all this, he becomes an industrialist. At that time, from the twenties to the forties of the nineteenth century, this was a bold innovation, there was nothing humiliating in it. (I am not speaking of those gentlemen industrialists, whose factories and mills were part of their hereditary estates, and helped to swell the income

from them, while they themselves had nothing to do with them.) Very few privy councillors went in for this. Their rank would not allow them to, and the name of merchant was not considered distinguished.

The struggle between uncle and nephew reflects both the break—then only just beginning—with old conceptions and morals, with sentimentality, the absurd exaggeration of the feelings of love and friendship, the poetry of idleness, the family and domestic fictions of affected, in reality non-existent, emotions (e. g., the spinster-aunt's idea of love, etc.), the time wasted in visiting, unnecessary, hospitality, and so on.

In a word, all the idle, dreamy, affected side of the old morals with the usual youthful impulses towards the lofty, the great, the aesthetic, the striving after effect, the thirst to express everything in sparkling prose, and, even more, in poetry.

All this had become a thing of the past, and faint gleams of the new dawn, of what was sober, practical, necessary, had begun to appear.

The former, that is the old, is represented by the nephew, who for that reason stands out more vividly.

The latter—the sober consciousness of the necessity for deeds, work, knowledge—is expressed through the uncle; but this consciousness has only just come into being, only the first symptoms have appeared, complete development is as yet far off, and, as is natural, these beginnings find but a faint, inadequate reflection, here and there, in single individuals and small groups, and so the uncle-image is paler than the nephew-image.

*Nadenka*, the girl who is the symbol of Aduyev's love, is also a reflection of the period. She is no longer the daughter utterly submissive to her parents. Her mother is wax in her hands and barely able to preserve the

merest semblance of maternal authority, though always declaring that *she is very strict, even if she says nothing*, and that Nadenka *never takes a single step without her permission*. She feels herself that this is not true, that she is weak, and she is so blind that, while allowing her daughter complete liberty, both as regards Aduyev and the count, she has no idea of what is really going on.

The daughter is a few steps ahead of her mother. She falls in love with Aduyev *without waiting for permission*, and hardly troubles to conceal this from her mother, merely holding her tongue for the sake of propriety, considering herself entitled to dispose of *her inner life* as she likes, and domineering over Aduyev, whose measure she has taken. He is her obedient slave, gentle, weakly good-natured, not without promise, just a vain, simple, ordinary youth, whose name is legion. She might have accepted him, become his wife, and all would have followed the usual course.

But the count appears on the scene—wise, deliberate, deft, brilliant. Nadenka sees that Aduyev cannot bear comparison with him, either as regards mind, character, or manners. Nadenka's life has not afforded her opportunities to form any sort of ideals as to masculine dignity and strength.

Indeed, no such ideal existed at that time, for there was no independent life. Onegin and his like were the only ideal characters—dandies, celebrities, scorning the pettiness of work, and not knowing what to do with themselves.

Nadenka now saw that the young Aduyev was not a real force, that in him was reproduced everything that she had seen a thousand times in all the other youths with whom she had danced and mildly flirted. There was a brief interval in which she listened to his poems. The

writing of verse was in those days a passport to the ranks of the intelligentsia. She expected to find power and talent there. But his verses turned out to be only just tolerable, no one had ever heard of them, and he actually harboured a secret grudge against the count for his simplicity and cleverness, and for knowing how to behave. Nadenka went over to the count's side and this was the first *conscious step taken by the Russian girl*—tacit emancipation, a protest against her mother's authority, which was no longer binding for her.

But here ended her emancipation. She became *conscious*, but *did not convert her consciousness into activity*, and so remained *unenlightened*, for the note of the period just then was one of unenlightenment. People did not yet know what to do with themselves, where to go, what to take up. Onegin and his fellow "idealist characters" merely languished in inaction, having no definite aims or work, and the Tatyanas were unenlightened.

"What will come of it?" Aduyev asks Nadenka, aghast. "The count will not marry you."

"I don't know," she replies wearily. The Russian girl really did not know how to act consciously and rationally in any given case. She could only vaguely feel she might sometimes protest against being *given in marriage by her parents*, and could only, unconsciously, of course, like Nadenka, express this protest, by rejecting one man and yielding to her feelings for another.

Here I have left Nadenka. I no longer require her as a type, and her personality has nothing to do with me.

Belinsky, too, remarked upon this. "So long as he needs her he takes trouble about her," he told someone, when speaking of me in my presence, "and then he flings her aside."

Many people have asked me what happened to Nadenka. How do I know? It was *not Nadenka, but the Russian*

girl of a certain circle, at a certain moment of the period in whom I was interested. I never knew a single Nadenka personally, or I knew a great many.

I shall be told that she and other characters are insignificant, and do not represent types. This is very likely, and I am not in a position to argue the point. I can only state what they meant to me.

In the beginning of the forties, while I was meditating and writing this novel, I had not as yet seen clearly into the next period, which had not begun, though anticipations of it were already stirring within me, for, soon after the publication in the *Sovremennik* (1847) of *The Same Old Story*, I had the plan of *Oblomov* ready, and in 1848 (or, perhaps, I am not sure, 1849) I published *Oblomov's Dream*—the overture on which the whole novel was based—in the *Sovremennik's Illustrated Review*, showing that I was mentally reacting to this period, also, and intuitively conscious of what was to come. Now I can relate “what happened to Nadenka.”

Look into *Oblomov*—Olga is the reincarnation of Nadenka in the next epoch....

Aduev ended up as most people then did. He heeded the practical wisdom of his uncle, took a post in a government office, contributed to the magazines (but no longer verses), having *survived* the era of youthful agitation, gained all sorts of worldly benefits, like the majority of his contemporaries occupied a solid position in his office, and married well—in a word, managed his life efficiently. And this is the gist of *The Same Old Story*.

Among my books this is the first gallery, acting as an ante-room to the next two galleries or periods of Russian life closely connected as they are—*Oblomov* and *The Abyss*, or *The Dream* and *The Awakening*.



...In conclusion I still have to reply to the last questions put to me from all sides. These are: why did I take so long—up to ten years—to write my novels? And, next: why do I not write any more?

The answer to the first question, or reproach, is partially given in what I have already written here.

I would merely add that if anyone takes the trouble to discover the meaning of my novels, and find in them even a little of the significance I myself see in them, he will not require to be an author himself in order to appraise and define the invisible but enormous labour which the construction of such a literary edifice requires.

...Belinsky once said, "...another would have found material for ten novels—he puts it all into one."

He said this of the shortest of all my novels—*The Same Old Story*.

What would he have said of *Obломov* or of *The Abyss*, in which I have put as it were the whole of my own life and that of many others?

Whether this is good or bad is another question (it is not for me to answer it). But if prolonged periods—from the 'forties to the 'seventies—are covered by my novels, it may be asked whether the description of scenes, undergoing development and being written side by side with the current of life itself, could have been accomplished in a year or two of work? Of course it could not.

The last question: why have I not written and why am I not writing any more?

I cannot, I do not know how to. That is to say I cannot write, and do not know how to write other than in images, scenes, and at great length, so that I must write slowly and with difficulty.

A certain freshness of powers and aspirations are required for the creation of images and scenes—and there



is a time for everything. Towards the end of his life man grows weary in the struggle with everyone and everything which sets obstacles in his path, with all who do not understand him, are hostile to him.

I am no journalist, no professional critic, I have lived and written mainly under the influence of imagination—and beyond the sphere of this my pen has little force, refuses to move.

My collaboration in magazines in the capacity of reviewer and contributor should never have been asked—I tried, and nothing came of it but a few lifeless articles which could not bear comparison with the products of the lively pen of skilled journalists.

Nor were the subjects for a novel suggested to me of any more use. "Describe such and such an event, such and such a life, take up this or that problem, this or that hero or heroine."

I cannot, I do not know how to. *All that has not grown up and matured within me*, that I have not seen and observed, by which I have not lived, is foreign to my pen. I have (or had) my own field, my own background, just as I have my own native land, atmosphere, friends and foes, my own world of observations, impressions and memories—and I have written only *what I knew from experience, what I have thought, felt, loved, what I have seen and known intimately*—in a word I have written *my own life and that which adhered to it*.

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